THE GROUNDS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH RATIONAL:

In Answer to

CHRISTIANITY

Not founded on

ARGUMENT.

By THOMAS MOLE.

LONDON:

Printed for T. COX, at the Lamb under the Royal Exchange. M,DCC,XLIII.

(Price One Shilling and Six-Pence.)

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Explained and

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THE GROUNDS OF CHRISTIAN FAITH RATIONAL.

IT is much to be wiſhed, that, in all inquiries about the chriſtian religion, that only ſhould be conſidered as ſuch, and come into the queſtion, which lies originally in the ſacred writings of the New Teſtament. For Chriſtianity as it is there laid down, and as it has been ſince eſtabliſhed in the various writings and laws of men, are different things, and very wide of one another. To intereſt Chriſtianity, not in what Chriſt, but in what men have made it, and to direct our inquiries and determine our ſentiments about it from theſe later gloſſes, is much the ſame thing; as if we were to judge of the nature and meaning of the law of Moſes from the falſe interpretations and ſpurious additions, with which the Phariſees had corrupted it: which, however they went under the

name of the Jewiſh religion, very widely differed from it; as what the ſyſtems and formula's of many modern churches ſet forth for the chriſtian religion, does differ from what is truly ſuch.

Nothing ſhews more weakneſs than to receive things ſo different as one and the ſame, or wickedneſs than knowing that difference to repreſent them as the ſame. For whatever is called Chriſtianity, that only is deſervedly eſteemed ſo, which lies in the Scriptures; and that is a very vain objection againſt the true doctrine of Chriſt, which is drawn from it, as it lies in the moſt authorized ſyſtems and compoſitions of men.

And in ſtating the doctrine of Chriſtianity it is ſcarcely conſiſtent with the juſtice that is due to it, or the ſincerity with which our inquiries about it ought to be conducted, to ſelect a few ſcattered ſentences from the Scriptures, and conſider them as intire and independent propoſitions: ſince ſo detached they may be eaſily made to expreſs a meaning different from their true one, or even quite contrary to it; which can only be learnt by viewing them in the connexion with thoſe diſcourſes, from which they are taken, and conſidering the purpoſe, to which the ſpeaker or writer applies them.

Nor is it the likelieſt way to give a fair account of the doctrine of the Scriptures, if leaving the places, in which it is moſt fully and plainly declared, we form a ſyſtem founded on obſcure and difficult paſſages; and preſume to determine the ſenſe and meaning of them arbitrarily and at pleaſure, without any regard to the view of the ſpeaker, or to the argument of his diſcourſe, or to any other places, wherein his meaning is more plainly expreſſed by himſelf, and more eaſily to be diſcovered by us.

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In interpreting the words, or repreſenting the ſentiments of any other writers, we never make uſe of ſuch methods as theſe; or think, we have any right to uſe them: and if we did, whatever we might eſteem ourſelves, we ſhould hardly with others paſs for fair interpreters. And why ſhould ſuch methods be taken, or allowed, in repreſenting the ſenſe of the ſacred writings; which are eſteemed miſrepreſentations in the caſe of all other writings, and reckoned highly injurious to them?

It has been cuſtomary with many profeſſors of Chriſtianity to place reaſon and faith in a view of oppoſition, and to look upon them in ſome meaſure, as they do upon light and darkneſs; whereof one ſubſiſts not, but at the deſtruction of the other: ſo that reaſon in their opinion, inſtead of being any ways helpful or conducive to faith, is one of the greateſt hinderances of it; and what, before we can come truly to believe, muſt be intirely renounced and removed out of the way. This would not be to be wondered at, if either men, who on the one hand call our paſſions by the name of reaſon, ſhould repreſent it in that light as a hinderance to the faith of true Chriſtianity; or if on the other hand men, who call popery by the name of the chriſtian religion, ſhould repreſent even right reaſon as altogether repugnant to the faith of that. And poſſibly it may be found in many caſes to have been owing to one or other of theſe miſnomers, that reaſon and faith have been ſet in ſuch diametrical oppoſition. In either of theſe caſes, I own, I ſhould be as much for the abſolute inconſiſtency of faith with reaſon, as any one whoſoever. But if by faith is meant the belief of the doctrines of Jeſus Chriſt; and by reaſon, what is juſtly and truly called ſo, the principle, which God has given us for the guidance of our actions, and whereby

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we are made to carry the reſemblance of him: I am ſo far from thinking, that reaſon and faith are inconſiſtent, and ſubſiſt one by the deſtruction of the other; that I think no two things in the world are at more perfect agreement, and that faith cannot poſſibly ſubſiſt without reaſon. We cannot in my opinion ſet them at variance, as thus underſtood, without injuring the reputation of the chriſtian religion, going contrary to the mind of the great founder of it, and hindering its eſteem and reception in the world; tho I can readily allow, men may poſſibly do that, who intend not, but would dread the promoting theſe conſequences.

But in the debate on this head the queſtion, I think, is not, whether reaſon of itſelf could have made the diſcovery of the doctrine of Chriſtianity; or whether, when it was propoſed, the principle of reaſon by its own ſtrength, and without any other helps, than what are contained in the doctrine alone, could have fully diſcovered the intire evidence of its divine original and authority, and led men to that faith of it required in the Goſpel. But the queſtion, I think, is, whether, when the doctrine of Chriſtianity was diſcovered to men, propoſed to them as from God, and attended with thoſe circumſtances, which both Chriſt and his apoſtles employed as proofs of its being ſo; the due exerciſe of reaſon was capable of bringing men to the belief of it.

The author of *Chriſtianity not founded on Argument* has eſpouſed the negative; and, if I do not miſtake, as it thus particularly relates to the faith of Chriſtianity.

His words are: " [a] I am fully perſuaded, that " the judging at all of religious matters is not the " proper province of reaſon, or indeed an affair " where

[a] page 7.

" where ſhe has any concern;" and, " [a] Reaſon, " or the intellectual faculty, could not poſſibly, " both from its own nature and that of religion, " be the principle intended by God to lead us into " a true faith." Again: " [b] The moſt and the " beſt of every religious profeſſion do never con- " cern themſelves the leaſt in any argumentative " taſks, or would indeed be ever the wiſer for it, " if they did;" and, " [c] He, that has once arri- " ved at the full and laſting aſſurance of a juſt " and heavenly faith, can never be to ſeek at any " time for the grounds and motives of his firſt " conviction and dependence; having never for " his part dealt at all in the evidence of rea- " ſon."

The principal ſtrength of this author's reaſon- ings, in order to make his point good, is contained in the paſſages, which he quotes from the writings of the New Teſtament to ſupport it. But the whole of that ſtrength intirely depends on this ſingle ſuppoſition, that thoſe paſſages contain and carry in them, as they ſtand in the ſacred writings, the very ſenſe he has given them, as they ſtand in his book; and that he has there placed them in the very ſame light, they appear in, as viewed in the places, from whence he has taken them: ſee- ing otherwiſe they cannot poſſibly be of ſervice to his cauſe. I could willingly ſubmit to put the pre- ſent debate upon this ſingle iſſue, whether the ſenſe he has affixed to them be the true one, or not. And this is indeed the point, upon which this ar- gument turns, and by which this inquiry muſt ne- ceſſarily be decided between perſons, who are believers. For if the meaning, he has put upon thoſe paſſages, ſhould appear upon inquiry to be a falſe and miſtaken one; and the contrary opi- nion, againſt which all his arguments from reaſon are

[a] ibid. [b] p. 22. [c] p. 30.

are leveled, to be every where the doctrine of the Scriptures throughout: thoſe arguments from reaſon muſt then of conſequence be looked on as arguments againſt the truth of Chriſtianity in general, not to be made uſe of by believers; or as no arguments at all, and not to be made uſe of by any perſons.

But ſo far as I ſhall at preſent enter into this inquiry, the method I ſhall obſerve, ſhall be,

Firſt, To ſtate the notion of that faith, which Jeſus required of thoſe, to whom he propoſed his doctrine; that the end of it might be anſwered, and the great bleſſing of it in its full complement might be obtained by them.

Secondly, To make appear its connexion with the principle of reaſon, and dependence on the exerciſe of it.

Thirdly, To reply to thoſe arguments, which our author makes uſe of, drawn from the nature both of reaſon and religion, to ſhew, that reaſon could not poſſibly be intended by God to lead us to true faith.

Firſt, I ſhall ſtate the notion of that faith, which Jeſus required of thoſe perſons, to whom he propoſed his doctrine; that the end of it might be accompliſhed, and the great bleſſing of it in its full complement might be obtained by them.

Jeſus came as one, whom *God* had *ſent* [a] to mankind. His commiſſion was to teach the doctrines of repentance, remiſſion, holineſs, and eternal life. Such a perſon had been promiſed, and was expected amongſt the Jews; and he was indeed wanted all over the world. Whether, when he claimed ſuch a character, and delivered his commiſſion to mankind in theſe circumſtances, he merited intire credit, or not, muſt neceſſarily have taken up ſome time to aſcertain; but that he deſerved conſideration

[a] John vi. 29.

tion and attention, appears at first view. Every circumstance of their condition, and of his appearance among them, had a tendency to persuade them to listen to such tidings, as he brought; and to be at any pains to know whether they were true, or not: "[a] as this was a subject in the "world, wherein it is the most material to think "right; where it is indeed of the most tremen-"dous consequence to be mistaken."

It was a grace, which the author of the world bestowed on it, to send Jesus on the delivery of such a doctrine to it; but the issue and success depended upon the manner, in which men should receive him, and treat the message he came to bring them from God. All, to whom it was directed, were laid under an obligation, but not under a necessity, of regarding and receiving him in the manner, which he deserved. Whether this should take place, or not, was a matter of their choice; in which, tho they were invited, directed, and assisted, they were however left to the free determination of their own minds.

Faith is owing to causes, which depend partly on the person, who requires; and partly on him, who exercises it: by the concurrence only of which it is produced, and necessarily prevented by a failure on either part. It is necessary, that the person requiring faith should propose the matter of it, with the evidence of its truth, as essential to the credibility, and a necessary mean or motive to the faith of it. For faith includes in the very idea of it a knowledge of the matter, and persuasion of its truth, founded on an acquaintance with and acquiescence in the evidence. Should any one require faith, without proposing either the one or the other, it would be an unreasonable demand, and

[a] p. 1.

impoſſible to be complied with; it being to require us to believe, we know not what, and we know not why. And tho men make ſuch demands, it is incredible that God ſhould; and it cannot be pretended, that Chriſt ever did make any ſuch. And therefore the faith, which I propoſe to inquire into the nature of, I on purpoſe call *the faith, which Jeſus required of the perſons, to whom he propoſed his doctrine:* becauſe I take it for granted, that faith, as a duty, muſt bear relation to thoſe, who have the opportunity of acquaintance with it, and that it muſt be limited to ſuch; ſince it is not conceivable, how men can poſſibly believe, or how they can juſtly be obliged to believe in one, *of whom they have never heard.* The miſſion and character, with which he comes from God, and the doctrine he delivers in his name, is to be the matter of their faith; and therefore muſt neceſſarily be laid before them, before they can be in any capacity, or under any obligation of believing at all. But ſo ſoon as Jeſus had himſelf perſonally aſſerted his miſſion, and delivered his doctrine to the Jewiſh people, or by other means to other perſons; it became the immediate duty of ſuch perſons to receive it: I do not ſay, as the matter of their faith, which might not have been in their power; but as the ſubject of their careful conſideration and inquiry, which undoubtedly it was.

The conſideration of his miſſion and doctrine is not the faith of them, nor inquiring into them believing them. But that careful inquiry naturally precedes and prepares the way for believing them, is evident; both becauſe there is no way for us to diſtinguiſh a real meſſenger of God from an impoſtor, no way whereby his preeminence above ſuch could be of any advantage to him, or efficacy to us, without inquiry; and becauſe the acknowledgment

ledgment of even a real meſſenger, upon the bare merit of his aſſertion, and irreſpectively to any argument or evidence of his being ſuch, would be but a blind and irrational credulity; and not of the nature, excellence, or efficacy of true faith without it.

It is not only neceſſary to the poſſibility of faith, that the matter or object of it be laid before the mind, but alſo the evidence of its truth; for faith has as near a relation to the one, as it has to the other. Whether facts or doctrines are made the objects, faith conſiders them as true; and this, in conſequence of their having the evidence of truth, and of our perceiving it. Antecedent to ſuch evidence diſcovered and apprehended, we may think and conſider; but cannot believe about them. Whether God will forgive the ſins of penitents, muſt be matter of queſtion and doubt only; we can never conſider it as true, and as ſuch believe it, without conſidering the evidence, which ariſes from the perfections and declarations of God. Theſe arguments of its truth are the grounds of our faith. Whether at the end of the world the dead ſhall be raiſed, before the perſons then alive ſhall be changed, is a ſubject we might have thought on all the days of our lives, without coming to a deciſion or belief on that head; but that the dead ſhall be raiſed firſt, we believe on the evidence, which St. Paul's teſtimony affords of the truth of it. In like manner, the doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt might have been the matter of mens knowledge, from the bare propoſal of it; its truth notwithſtanding, till the evidence came to be conſidered, muſt have remained in doubt, mens minds in ſuſpenſe, and faith would have been impoſſible. That it was indeed the will of God, that Jeſus was ſent by him to deliver it, that he would verify and

punctually fulfil the promiſes therein made in his name, appeared only from the evidence, which attended the propoſal, for the purpoſe of atteſting its original and authority. Hence it was diſcovered to be true: hence men perceived it to be true, and believed. There are various kinds and degrees of evidence; but evidence of ſome kind and degree there muſt be, let the command of believing be ever ſo peremptory, before a compliance can become poſſible.

Suppoſing the doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt to have had all poſſible evidence of truth; if he could not have led men into the conſideration of the evidence, he could never have brought them to the belief of the truth of it. And if we ſhould ſuppoſe ever ſo great numbers to have blindly owned him, for whatever he had called himſelf, and implicitly received whatever he taught them for the truth (the treatment which the credulous give to impoſtors) it is impoſſible, he ſhould have been much pleaſed with, or honoured by ſuch a reception; or that it could have had any great and laſting effect upon thoſe, who gave it him: neither would ſuch a conduct have deſerved the name of faith, or come up to the notion of what the Scripture requires as ſuch.

The ſending of Jeſus Chriſt, the ſending him with authority to deliver ſuch a doctrine, and with all circumſtances of credibility, were things which depended upon the will of God, all requiſite to the poſſibility of mens believing. But there were many qualities in men themſelves, to whom ſuch a doctrine was propoſed, which, according as they took place, would promote, or prevent their actual belief of it.

An indifference of mind to truth or falſhood, or diſtinguiſhing them by their paſſions; an obſtinate adherence to principles, they were at preſent,

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and had long been poſſeſſed of, for that very reaſon, and which were taken up upon no better; ſlothfulneſs, pride, and a determined bent to vice: theſe were all ſo many bars and bolts, which kept ſuch a doctrine, as was that of Chriſt's, from ever entering into the conſideration of many perſons; and were very powerful hinderances to its having effect upon the minds of others, into whoſe conſideration it did enter: which qualities and affections by no means diſparaged the truth, or evidence of it; but greatly diſhonoured their characters, who rejected it. A removal of the bias and prejudice they were under from theſe qualities againſt him was requiſite, as previous to their entertaining a juſt opinion, or coming to the faith of him. Such therefore he told: *Except ye convert, and become as little children, ye will not enter the kingdom of heaven* [a].

On the contrary, a love of truth, a yielding to inſtruction, a laudable deſire of ſatisfaction about their moral conduct here, and eternal condition hereafter, ſuch degrees of virtue as well as knowledge, as had been acquired, and learnt under the Father in thoſe former methods, wherein he had vouchſafed to inſtruct and teach them; were as the harbingers of faith in every mind, in which they were found. Such was his own judgment in the caſe: *To this end was I born, and for this cauſe came I into the world, that I ſhould bear witneſs unto the truth* [b]. *Every one, who is of the truth, heareth my voice*; and, *Every one, who hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me* [c]. No one could deſire a readier attention, or more favourable hearing, than perſons of ſuch characters would be willing to afford Chriſt. And as it caſt no diſhonour upon the character and merit of Chriſt, or his doctrine, to be rejected by men of the foregoing vicious

[a] Matt. xviii. 3. [b] John xviii. 37. [c] ch. vi. 45.

cious complexion of mind; it redounded not a little to their credit, to meet with ſuch a cordial reception and entertainment, with all thoſe of this virtuous one. And accordingly we find our Saviour often expreſſing his deſire of meeting, pleaſure in finding, and aſſurance of ſucceſs in propoſing his divine miſſion and doctrine to ſuch perſons, as theſe were; as he did a diffidence and diſtruſt of any ſucceſs among the others. None of which ſuppoſitions could poſſibly be grounded, but upon the influence, which a juſt, a rational, a laudable, and virtuous temper and conduct of the mind towards him, and his doctrine, had to lead men into the true faith of them.

Such diſpoſitions were agreeable to the reaſon and rectitude of human nature, were motives of inquiry into the merits of Chriſt's claims; they were means of diſcerning, whether they were well or ill grounded; and they were the moſt probable and likely cauſes, if it ſhould appear true, of their embracing it. How could Chriſt be otherwiſe than deſirous of meeting with ſuch a temper of mind as this, who was conſcious of the truth of his miſſion and doctrine, and knew how favourable ſuch a temper was to his religion, how powerfully it diſpoſed to the deſired inquiry into it, and how perfect a preparation it was for the faith of it? Such a temper of mind was on all accounts calculated to make it a matter of mutual ſatisfaction, both to our Saviour, who obſerved it, and to thoſe, who were indued with it, that they had met with one another: and it is hard to ſay, whether he, as a maſter, would be more delighted at meeting with ſuch ſcholars; or they, as ſcholars, that they had been ſo happy, as to meet with ſuch a maſter: theſe being the perſons, who, as it was their purpoſe *to do the will of God*, would, when Chriſt came to teach it, be reſolved to exa-

mine, whether his doctrine was of God, would be beſt qualified for making the inquiry, and would be ſecure of diſcovering the truth in the iſſue [a].

This was a method of addreſſing men, which one would hardly expect from an impoſtor; and a method, which carries in it ſome degree of probability, that he is not indeed ſuch, who makes uſe of it: ſince there was nothing required in all this temper, and treatment of them, but what was in their power, was their duty, was highly equitable and laudable in them; and what, conſidering the importance of the meſſage he had to deliver them, and the dignity of the character and conduct, with which he came to them, he might juſtly expect, and they wiſely afford.

Such a conduct as this of Chriſt's has in its place a kind of argument of the reality of his miſſion, as it ſerves to ſet the equity and integrity of his character in ſo fair a light; it carrying ſome degree of evidence, that he was not a deceiver, that he looked for ſuch inquirers, and incouraged ſuch methods of inquiry, which in other caſes are effectual to the detection and diſcovery of impoſtors and deceivers; and muſt, where they took place, have diſcovered, whether himſelf was a deceiver, or not.

Having conſidered the cauſes, I proceed to conſider the nature of faith. And by faith I mean ſuch a belief of the miſſion and doctrine of Jeſus Chriſt, as ſtands connected in a way of moral operation with the exerciſe of repentance, and the ſubſequent practice of ſincere virtue; and leads into a compliance with every qualification, which Chriſt required for remiſſion and ſalvation. Repentance and virtue were the great leſſons, which he was ſent to be a teacher of, and which faith was required as preparatory to their learning; and for this

[a] John vii. 17.

this reaſon, that it was, and ſo far forth as it was, the moral cauſe or inſtrument of leading men to the practice of theſe duties, was it in God's appointment made the condition of his beſtowing the bleſſings of remiſſion and ſalvation on them. A faith, which is no way connected with theſe things, when the uſe and excellence of that, which is required, conſiſts in its being a mean of them, it can be of no ſervice to any to have, or detriment to be without, and is not indeed worth diſputing about; but true faith is that principle, in virtue of which men enter into the practice of every moral duty, and into a right of inheritance to eternal felicity. That faith ſtands thus connected with virtue, appears from almoſt every thing, that is ſaid of it in the Scriptures. It is ſometimes called the *holy faith* [a]. At other times we read of the *obedience* [b], and *righteouſneſs of faith* [c]; and alſo of *faith being reckoned for righteouſneſs* [d]. And that it bears this relation to eternal life, our Saviour declares; *Verily, verily, I ſay unto you, he, who believeth in me, hath everlaſting life* [e].

Faith is not of a tranſient nature, but a principle of laſting and abiding uſe, whoſe influence extends to the whole compaſs of our duty, and whoſe uſe endures thro the period of our lives. For as it is the inſtrument of virtue, which is to be our practice, while we live in the world; by true faith we muſt neceſſarily underſtand a permanent principle, ever dwelling in the mind, the exerciſe of which is to be kept up, and its influence applied, ſo often, and ſo long, as there is any virtue for us to practiſe, or as there is any danger of our deviating and deſiſting. And it is for this reaſon, that thoſe images are borrowed from the *natural* life of men to repreſent the *moral* life of Chriſtians by,

[a] Jude 20. [b] Rom. xvi. 26. [c] ch. iv. 13. [d] ver. 5. [e] John vi. 47. iii. 36.

by, who are deſcribed as *ſtanding*, *walking*, and *living by faith* [a]; and that it is ſpoken of, as the weapon of their warfare, and armour of defence againſt the power of *vice* [b], and that by which they acquire *victory* [c] and triumph.

But that we may not miſtake, it is neceſſary to conſider, that, tho this faith be the moral cauſe or principle of virtue; yet it is not the mere poſſeſſion of it, in its utmoſt extent, that will neceſſarily, as ſuch, ſecure this effect: for no moral principle is of neceſſary operation. We muſt attend to the nature and manner of operation of moral cauſes, to ſee how faith is productive of this effect. An architect has a ſtructure to raiſe: this is an effect, for which he muſt be provided with the natural means, ſuch as the materials, inſtruments, and ſkill; which are the natural means whereby ſuch an effect riſes. But an architect may have all theſe, and yet no ſtructure ever riſe at all, for want of the due uſe, exerciſe, and application of them. The Chriſtian is this architect: the ſtructure he has to raiſe, is his moral character; faith is in his mind, what the inſtruments and materials of building are in the hands of an architect: hence *is he thoroughly furniſhed for his work*. But the Chriſtian may be poſſeſſed of it in its utmoſt ſtrength, he may know every article of Chriſt's doctrine, every action of his life, every argument of his divinity, and firmly believe; and yet the effect fail of following in this caſe, as in the other, and for the ſame reaſon, the neglect to uſe, exerciſe, and apply it, in its native force and efficacy, to the mind for that purpoſe. Faith muſt have an internal operation upon the mind, and conſequently there muſt be an application of it thereto, in the way of con-

[a] 2 Cor. i. 24. v. 7. Gal. ii. 20. [b] Eph. vi. 16. [c] 1 John v. 5.

tinued attention and meditation: ſince it is as vain for us to expect, that the faith of Chriſt's doctrine ſhould be productive of a virtuous life and character, without ſuch an active application and employment of it; as it would be for an architect to expect an edifice to riſe by his mere poſſeſſion of all requiſite means, without his ever uſing them at all to that purpoſe. And hence we muſt account for the great diſproportion between the effect, which both reaſon and faith are capable of producing, and that which they do actually produce; and the ſmall number of virtuous men under the influence of either, in compariſon of what they are each of them calculated for effecting.

And from what has been ſaid, it is obvious to obſerve, that faith is of a gradual and progreſſive nature; at firſt ſmall, in compariſon of what it afterwards increaſes and grows to. Faith doth not conſiſt in a point, nor become compleat in an inſtant; but admits of increaſe, and gradually grows up from ſmall beginings to greater and greater perfection. When Chriſt communicated the knowledge of his doctrine, it was not poſſible he ſhould impart it, or that any ſhould receive it all at once, but by parts and degrees only; therefore the knowledge, and conſequently the faith, muſt be greater or leſs at one time than another. And ſo likewiſe, when he perſuaded the faith of it, it was impoſſible his deſign ſhould take place all at once, or that men ſhould come to exerciſe faith in an inſtant; ſince faith has a neceſſary relation to evidence, ſprings from the perception of it, and grows in firmneſs, in proportion to the fullneſs and clearneſs of that. Till evidence appear, of ſome kind or degree, there can ariſe in the mind no true faith at all. While that is but partially and imperfectly apprehended, faith can but partially and imperfectly exiſt; but will grow in proportionable

fullneſs

fullneſs and ſtrength, as that opens and appears to the mind; and exiſt in its greateſt increaſe and ſtrength, when that is propoſed to men, and perceived by them in its greateſt compaſs and force. Agreeably hereto faith in the Scripture has the different denominations of *little* and *great* [a]. On this account St. Paul ſpeaks of the *furtherance* [b] of it, and of its *growing exceedingly* [c]. And hence are believers ſtiled ſome *weak* [d], ſome *ſtrong* [e]; and ſome are ſaid *to abound in the faith* [f].

This author has not profeſſedly ſtated his notion of faith; but if we may gather it, from what he has occaſionally droped on that head, it is far from coming up to the account the Scripture gives of it. He ſeems to make no more of it, than mere aſſent to revealed truths. His words are: [g] "Your boaſted rational faith is what I would "fain ſhew you to be a falſe, unwarranted notion "of your own, and without the leaſt ground to "ſupport it, either in nature or revelation. I "mean, that your aſſent to revealed truths ſhould "be founded upon the conviction of your under-"ſtanding." Now that this merely is not the faith, which is required by Chriſt, in order to acquire the great bleſſings of his religion, appears from conſidering the place in which it ſtands, and the uſe it is applied to in the chriſtian ſyſtem. It ſtands there as comprehending all that is requiſite to the forming mens tempers and lives to virtue; not as a ſingle act, or inſtance of it only; but a courſe of univerſal and perſevering virtue, uniformly maintained throughout the conduct of their lives. And this is the fruit, which is every where repreſented as naturally growing out of this prin-

[a] Matt. xiv. 31. xv. 28. [b] Phil. 1. 24. [c] 2 Theſſ. i. 3. [d] Rom. xiv. 1. [e] ch. iv. 20. [f] 2 Cor. viii. 7. [g] P. 7.

ciple. But this is a place, which faith, in our author's ſenſe, is not qualified to fill; and an effect, which it is by no means proportioned and adequate to the production of. There is nothing included in the nature of aſſent, conſidered merely as ſuch, that ſhould hinder it from exiſting in the minds of Chriſt's greateſt and moſt bitter enemies. And this was probably the caſe of the Phariſees, who appear to have been as little able to avoid aſſenting to the truth of his miſſion and doctrine, upon the evidence they had of it; as they were willing to own it, and to act in purſuance of it. To repreſent this, and this only, as the true faith of Chriſtianity, is to ſet up a fiction of our own fancies; and all argumentation founded on ſuch a notion of it is mere waſte of labour, and not in the leaſt applicable to the point in hand.

The exerciſe of faith, conſidered in the complex and compleat view of it, is principally the work and office of the will; and as ſuch is juſtly made the matter of a command, and compliance with it of duty. But aſſent (if indeed it does differ from conviction) is an act of the underſtanding, a neceſſary act, if what is neceſſary can be ſo called; and therefore cannot properly be made the matter of a command at all, which is directive of the action of the will, and relates only to what is the ſubject of our power and choice. And it does not appear that faith, as it ſignifies aſſent only, and no more, is ever commanded under that notion in the ſacred Scripture: but if it had, as aſſent is an effect of the preceding voluntary conduct of the mind, and a mean of ſubſequent virtue and obedience, no objection would hence lie againſt the command of it; ſeeing it is ſo frequent not only in the ſacred, but in all other writings, to make uſe of a trope, and put the cauſe for the effect, and effect for the cauſe. And therefore thoſe injunctions,

junctions, if any ſuch there were, muſt neceſſarily be underſtood by us in that manner, and ſuppoſed to relate either to the docility, love of truth, care of examination, and attention to evidence, which are free actions of the mind, preceding and producing aſſent; or to that virtue, which follows from its efficacy and influence, as in that manner given. And that our Saviour thus conſidered faith as a piece of voluntary conduct, and work of the will, an effect which the free determination of it leads to, appears from thoſe inſtances, wherein he tells men, they *will not believe*, will not exerciſe that integrity, impartiality, and ſearch, which it requires; and for want of which, he at other times tells them, tho they had capacity and means, that they *cannot believe* [a]. *The elders of the people, and the chief prieſts, and the ſcribes came together, and led him into their council, ſaying, Art thou the Chriſt? tell us. And he ſaid, If I tell you, ye will not believe; and if I alſo aſk you, you will not anſwer me, nor let me go* [b]. And on this account it is, that he alſo in other places ſpeaks of their *ſining, becauſe they believed not on him* [c].

This may receive ſome confirmation from conſidering the cauſes aſſigned by our Saviour, as the hinderances and lets to mens believing on him; by which it will appear, that it was by no means owing to any defect of underſtanding, or incapacity of aſſent, but to a failure of the will, and want of thoſe virtuous and laudable qualities, which depended upon that.

Thus ſometimes he aſcribes it to ambition, and love of that honour and eſteem, which comes from men. *How can ye believe, who receive honour one of another; and ſeek not that honour, which cometh from God only* [d]? Sometimes he aſcribes it to an attachment

[a] John xii. 39, 40. [b] Luke xxii. 66, 67, 68. [c] John xvi. 9. [d] ch. v. 44.

ment to their luſts, which hinder men from receiving ſuch a doctrine as his, which was calculated for the reſtraint of them. [a] *I ſpeak that, which I have ſeen with my Father; and ye do that, which ye have ſeen with your father. Ye ſeek to kill me, a man who hath told you the truth, which I have heard of God. If God were your father, you would love me; for I proceeded forth, and came from God: neither came I of myſelf, but he ſent me. Why do ye not underſtand my ſpeech? even becauſe ye cannot hear my word. Ye are of your father the devil, and the luſts of your father ye will do; and becauſe I tell you the truth, ye believe me not.* Sometimes he aſcribes it to a want of a tractable and teachable mind. *But ye believe not, becauſe ye are not of my ſheep* [b]. At other times he ſpeaks of it, as owing to their not having cultivated thoſe good habits of mind, and improved the helps to them, which God had afforded them under an antecedent diſpenſation. [c] *Every man, who hath heard, and learned of the Father, cometh unto me. But there are ſome of you, who believe not: therefore ſaid I unto you, that no man can come unto me, except it were given unto him of my Father:* i. e. none of you can come unto me, but in the exerciſe of thoſe laudable diſpoſitions of mind, which the Father hath afforded you powers, and means, and commands to cultivate; and which, when you do cultivate, will lead you to believe on me.

That our Saviour underſtood by faith in him, more than mere aſſent to the truth of Chriſtianity, is evident from hence; that theſe vices were hinderances of that faith, which he required; but were no hinderances of ſuch aſſent. Theſe ſpots and blemiſhes of the human mind were conſiſtent with the cleareſt and fulleſt aſſent to the truths of Chri-

[a] John viii. 38, 40, 42—45. [b] ch. x. 26. [c] ch. vi. 45, 65.

Chriſtianity, conſidered merely as ſuch; or to any truths whatſoever. Were not the Phariſees, was not Judas, were not the perſons guilty of the ſin againſt the Holy Ghoſt, inſtances full to this purpoſe? And had not thoſe, or any former times, furniſhed us with examples; ſhould we be to ſeek, and at a loſs to find in our own days, perſons aſſenting with all their underſtanding to the truth of Chriſtianity, who live and act a contradiction to its morals? But that aſſent, which is conſiſtent with ſuch vices, could not poſſibly be the faith they are contrary to. That aſſent, which permits them to remain in the ſoul, and remains along with them in it, could not poſſibly be the faith, which they abſolutely exclude, and which cannot take place in it on account of their prevalence.

We no where indeed find ſuch a general definition laid down of faith, as includes all the particulars comprehended in the compleat idea of it; but its ſeveral properties are ſufficiently diſcovered, by what is ſaid of it at ſeveral times, according to the occaſion upon which it is mentioned, and the view with which it is ſpoke of. Nor is it any objection againſt any or all of them entering into the nature of true faith, that they are not in any place aſcribed to it at once. We have not, perhaps, all the parts and properties of any ſubject diſcourſed of in the Scriptures mentioned together. And it is not from a ſingle paſſage conſidered by itſelf, but from all, wherein it is diſcourſed on, compared together, that the intire notion of any ſubject is to be ſettled. For it was not the manner of Chriſt in his diſcourſes, or of the apoſtles in their writings, to make uſe of an artificial order and method; or to borrow thoſe rules and ornaments of diſcourſe, which the learned laid down, and carefully obſerved in their compoſitions. This was an admired branch of learning with the Greeks: but

as the Goſpel came with higher recommendations; and the *faith* of it was to *ſtand, not in the wiſdom of men, but in the power of God*, it was ſuitable to its dignity to paſs by ſuch minute advantages with contempt; ſince hereby it would appear, that the doctrine of Chriſt, tho thus plainly preached, and for that reaſon termed fooliſhneſs, had more force and efficacy to reform and ſave, than all that they had dignified with the name of wiſdom; and that it made its way by no other aſſiſtance, than what it had from itſelf, and what God was pleaſed to lend it; and however men might be diſpoſed, they ſhould have no handle to ſay, that its ſucceſs was built on any human foundation.

That true faith is of the compaſs and extent, and includes all the particulars, mentioned in the foregoing account of it, is, I think, further evident from all thoſe general and comprehenſive expreſſions, which our Saviour made uſe of as equivalent and explanatory, and employed to deſcribe it by. Thus he ſometimes ſpeaks of it, as *receiving him* [a], and his doctrine. Sometimes he ſpeaks of it as *coming after him*, and *following him* [b]; and at other times, as *taking on them his yoke, and learning of him* [c].

And from all theſe conſiderations it does, I think, fully appear, that true faith is that aſſent to the truth of Chriſt's miſſion and doctrine, which ariſes from a candid and careful conſideration of their matter and evidence; in conſequence of which aſſent we receive into our hearts the religion of Chriſt, as the rule of our moral conduct in this life, and the ground of our hope and expectation of a better; and under the influence of our faith in him obſerve all his precepts, and confide in the veracity and fulfilment of his promiſes.

[a] John i. 12. vi. 35. Mark iv. 20. [b] ch. x. 21. Luke ix. 23. [c] Matt. xi. 29.

Having ſtated the notion of that faith, which Jeſus required of thoſe, to whom he propoſed his doctrine, I proceed,

Secondly, To make appear the connexion there is between true faith and the principle of reaſon, and the dependence which faith has upon the exerciſe of reaſon.

As Chriſt was to propoſe a religion to rational creatures, and a religion, which raiſes the rational nature to the higheſt perfection; it is hard to conceive, how he could have made application to them, otherwiſe than by appealing to their reaſon; or how they could be capable of receiving it, otherwiſe than in the exerciſe of their reaſon.

And this will in ſome meaſure appear, if we conſider the cauſes, which on the part of God contribute to the begeting it in the minds of men; which are the declaration of the doctrine, and the propoſal of the evidence of its truth and divinity.

Without the power and the exerciſe of reaſon, men have no means of judging concerning the nature of a doctrine, or of diſtinguiſhing between a worthleſs one, and one the moſt wiſe and worthy to be received; nor can the real mind and meſſage of God have any advantage with them, over counterfeits and falſe pretences. When true and falſe prophets bring them doctrines of an oppoſite and inconſiſtent nature; when falſe Chriſts, as well as the true, ſet up their pretenſions to a miſſion and meſſage from God to men: what principle have they to decide and diſtinguiſh between them, if reaſon be ſet aſide; or ſaid to be of no manner of uſe, if exerciſed? What can be the meaning or uſe of this diſtinction between falſe prophets and true, as applied to men; if they have no mean or principle of making the diſtinction? They muſt, on ſuch ſuppoſition, either be under an obligation to receive all, or under an incapacity

to receive any, of one kind or another; and a revelation or diſcovery of the will of God may as well be made to creatures, who are void of reaſon, as to thoſe who are indued with it, if reaſon can contribute nothing to their receiving it. The very propoſing to men a doctrine as coming from God, ſuppoſes them capable of forming a judgment concerning the nature of it; and from that, whether it is likely, and worthy to come from him, or not. This is to be done by comparing the argument, or contents of it, with the perfections of God, from whom it pretends to come; and with the circumſtances of thoſe, from whom it claims a reception: all of which, as well the perfections of God, as the circumſtances of mankind, and the compariſon of the argument or contents of a doctrine with them, lie evidently within the compaſs and reach of reaſon. Whatever is ſaid to the contrary, is ſaid in contradiction to fact and experience, and ſubverts the poſſibility of God's ſending any declaration of his will to men, and their capacity of receiving any. This is a proceſs of reaſon, what it is able to carry on, and indeed the very firſt concern a man is ſuppoſed to be ingaged in, when he ſets about an inquiry into a ſubject of this nature; and upon taking this ſtep he will ſoon and eaſily diſcover, whether it becomes him to ſtop here, or go farther in his inquiry. For if the doctrine itſelf is diſcovered to contain, what is evidently repugnant to the perfections of God, it is ſuperfluous to ſeek after evidence of its coming from him; ſince no evidence can riſe higher of its coming from God, than ſuch certain contradiction to his attributes and perfections carries in it, that it does not; and conſequently an inquiry after evidence in ſuch caſe is inquiring after an impoſſibility, and what a man may be ſure he can never find.

But

But if upon going thro this examination he is ſatisfied, there is nothing in the contents of the doctrine to ſhew it cannot come from God, nothing but what is conſiſtent with the ſuppoſition, that it may, which he can only be by the power and exerciſe of reaſon; he will naturally look out to ſee, what evidence is to be had, that it actually does come from him. This is a diſtinct inquiry from the former; but they are nearly connected, and, I think, connected in this order, and both conducted by the exerciſe of the ſame power or principle. For as truth is the object of reaſon, without which we can have no acquaintance with it, or even idea of it at all; ſo all argument, or evidence of truth, is an appeal to reaſon; and the offering of it to us in behalf of any particular doctrine is ſubmiting the queſtion, concerning its truth or falſhood, ſo far as we are required to act upon it, to the judgment and deciſion of our reaſon. And the imploying of evidence on the part of God for the manifeſtation of the truth of any moral doctrine, or the conſidering it on our part for the purpoſe of diſcovering it, would be as abſurd and vain, if we were not poſſeſſed of this moral principle, and could not come at the end propoſed in the due exerciſe of it; as it would be in him to require us, or in us to endeavour to diſtinguiſh the colours, or any other qualities of natural objects, without our natural ſenſes. It is as abſurd therefore to aſſert, that our reaſon can be of no ſervice to us in the one caſe; as to pretend, that our ſenſes can be of no uſe to us in the other. God is the maſter, we are ſervants; but there muſt be a proportion between the work he ſets us to do, and the powers he gives us to do it with, to make the command equitable, or the performance poſſible: and without this neither the glory of his character as the king and governor, nor the felicity of our condi-

tion as the ſubjects of his government, can be aſcertained and ſecured.

Such arguments therefore, as tend to deſtroy this neceſſary proportion between our power and our duty, and particularly to prove the inſufficiency of reaſon to lead us to faith, when we have no other means, whereby we can be led to it; if they prove any thing, prove the abſurdity and impoſſibility of faith, are ſubverſive not only of the foundation of Chriſtianity, but of all natural religion, and are calculated for the overthrowing of all moral truth.

That faith is connected with the principle of reaſon, and depends upon the exerciſe of it, may appear from conſidering the cauſes, which contribute to faith, on the part of man. That moral knowledge, which conduces to a right behaviour in the preſent, and the hope of happineſs in a future life, is a moſt deſirable and delightful attainment, and of very great and general importance. This God had taught in a variety of methods. This all men might have learned of him, as many had, in ſome good degree, before the appearance of Chriſt in the world. A love of this kind of knowledge, a freedom and openneſs of mind to information on theſe heads, and a calm and careful examination into the grounds and evidence of its truth, were leſſons to be learned under the light of nature, and what men could not have learned without being diſpoſed to an equitable hearing of Chriſt, and without being in a fair way of coming to faith in him. Without ſome degree of theſe good moral diſpoſitions of mind it was indeed ſcarce probable, that ſuch a perſon as Chriſt, and ſuch a doctrine as his, would ordinarily meet with their deſerved treatment; but meeting with theſe, it is as little likely they would miſs of it. And that theſe laudable diſpoſitions

were

were in ſome meaſure requiſite and conducive to ſuch a diſcovery of the truth and authority of Chriſt's doctrine, as leads to a compliance with it, himſelf frequently declared; and they, who were indued with them, appear to have verified and experienced in fact. The connexion of faith therefore with the principle of reaſon, and dependence upon the uſe of it, is from hence manifeſt; ſince theſe habits were all of them the acquirements of reaſon, and were maintained by the continual exerciſe of it in the mind. So far therefore as theſe moral qualities are of rational growth, and the exerciſe of them contribute to the cordial reception of Chriſt, and his doctrine; ſo far reaſon is the cauſe of faith, or the principle that leads to it; and the connexion between them is ſufficiently confirmed. And in as much as this uſe was made of them, and this effect obtained from them, in favour of Chriſtianity, *reaſon* appears to be the very *principle*, and the *due exerciſe* of it the very *mean*, whereby *God intended, that men ſhould be led to the faith of it.* For that the power of reaſon, which men have from God, ſhould have this inherent tendency, that the due uſe of it, which God requires of them, ſhould have this certain conſequence, and that Chriſt ſhould draw men, and deſire them to come to him, in the very force and uſe of it; and yet that reaſon neither was, nor could be the principle, by which God intended they ſhould be led to true faith, is a moſt palpable contradiction, and no leſs abſurd, than to aſſert, that our eyes, and our ears, and our hands, neither are, nor can be the means, which God intends we ſhould ſee, and hear, and handle their reſpective objects withal.

When Jeſus Chriſt came into the world, he found it under a general and extreme corruption. This corruption was not however ſo univerſal, but that there ſubſiſted in it many honeſt and well diſ-

poſed minds, who were greatly raiſed above the groſs vices of the common maſs of mankind. They came far ſhort of thoſe great improvements in knowledge and virtue, which God intended them an opportunity of making under the inſtruction of Chriſt; but having in ſome degree improved the advantages he had aforetime granted them, they had put themſelves in actual readineſs to receive and improve thoſe, which he afforded them now. The Evangeliſts ſpeak of many *juſt* and *devout* men of the Jewiſh nation, who *waited for the coming of the kingdom of God* [a], *and looked for* it as *the conſolation of Iſrael* [b]; who, as the true children of their father Abraham, deſired to *ſee that day*; and when they *ſaw it, were glad* [c]. Such was Joſeph of Arimathea, ſuch was Simeon, ſuch were all thoſe, to whom Anna the propheteſs ſpake concerning Chriſt. And our Saviour himſelf often refers to this diſtinct claſs and character among men: ſometimes as thoſe who dealt in the merchandiſe of *goodly pearls*, whereby the moral doctrine of truth and virtue is figuratively deſcribed; who, when they met with one of ſuch great value, as was that of our Saviour, would be ſure not to miſs of making the purchaſe, whatever it ſhould coſt them. Sometimes he ſpeaks of them under another image, as the *good ground*, upon which the *good ſeed of his word* [d] falling fructifies, and brings forth a large increaſe. Nathaniel was an Iſraelite indeed before his acquaintance with Jeſus, and that was the cauſe of his firſt believing in him. Jeſus commanded his apoſtles, in their progreſs thro the cities for the preaching the Goſpel, to inquire, who in them were *worthy* [e]; as the perſons moſt likely to hear, and receive it, and by their influence

[a] Mark xv. 43. [b] Luke ii. 25, 38. [c] John viii. 56.
[d] Luke viii. 8. [e] Matt. x. 10, 11.

influence and example induce others to do the ſame. It was among ſuch *elect* [a] and choice perſons as theſe, that he expected followers with greateſt readineſs, and in greateſt numbers. It was in view to ſuch as theſe, that *in the laſt day, that great day of the feaſt, Jeſus ſtood, and cried, ſaying, If any man thirſt, let him come unto me, and drink* [b]. And was it not in reſpect to ſuch as theſe alſo, that he ſpake thoſe words: *Behold, I ſay unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields, for they are white already to a plenteous harveſt* [c]? And as there were many of this complexion among the Jewiſh people, there were not wanting thoſe of like diſpoſitions of mind among the Gentiles; in whom, as they proceeded from the ſame principle, they appear alſo to have produced the ſame effect. In one place we read of certain Greeks, who, as they *came up to Jeruſalem to worſhip God* [d], were earneſtly deſirous of being introduced to a particular conference with Chriſt. And in another place we read of a man of Ethiopia [e], an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treaſure, and had come to Jeruſalem to worſhip; and we ſee in him an inſtance, how readily ſuch, as were men of piety towards God, when they had the doctrine of the Goſpel preached to them, were induced and perſuaded to the faith and profeſſion of it. And this character in general of ſuch, as were indued with a good mind, and were deſirous of inſtruction in the way of virtue and eternal happineſs, ſeems, wherever it took place, to have led the Gentiles into the ſame ſentiments concerning Chriſt, and his doctrine, and into the ſame favourable reception of them. St. Luke ſays of them, that *when*

[a] Matt. xxii. 8. compared with ver. 14. [b] John vii. 37. [c] ch. iv. 35. Matt. ix. 38. [d] John xii. 20. [e] Acts viii. 27.

when they heard, that Chriſt was ſet to be a light of the Gentiles, that he ſhould be for ſalvation to the ends of the earth; they were glad, and glorified the Lord: and as many, as were diſpoſed to eternal life, believed [a]. This is the temper of reaſon, by which men lay themſelves fully open to the evidence of truth, and attraction of virtue; and come in conſequence to yield themſelves up to conviction and perſuaſion. By the advantage hereof truth tramples falſhood and impoſture under its feet, and virtue triumphs over all the power of vice. And therefore without it men were not in our Saviour's eſteem ἔυθετοι εἰς βασιλείαν Θεῦ, *rightly diſpoſed for the kingdom of God* [b].

But if reaſon has no power to lead us into the faith of Chriſtianity, how came Chriſt to expect, as we find he did, a more ready reception, and a greater number of converts, among thoſe, who were governed by it, and had made ſome improvements in it; than among thoſe, with whom it was thro neglect run to ruin? And how came the effect to anſwer his expectation? On the contrary we ſee, that where reaſon was in its beſt exerciſe and improvement, thence he conceived his moſt promiſing hopes, and there he gathered his moſt plentiful harveſt of diſciples and followers; while the ſame doctrine, which, like ſeed thrown into good ground, produced ſuch a large abundance of increaſe among thoſe, who had duly cultivated their reaſon, was loſt upon thoſe, who had abandoned and renounced it, like the ſeed that is ſown upon the high roads, or upon the hardeſt rocks.

I am far from thinking, or deſigning to aſſert, that the doctrine of Chriſt could become the object of faith to none but thoſe, who were of this diſpoſition, and in this degree of preparation to receive

[a] Acts xiii. 47, 48. [b] Luke ix. 62.

receive it. It was a pearl, which thoſe might have found, who ſought not after it; and come to be poſſeſſed and highly prized by thoſe, who before had neither deſire of its enjoyment, nor ſenſe of its value. And this is what our Saviour ſeems to have meant, when he ſays: *The kingdom of heaven is like to a treaſure hid in a field, which, when a man had found,* tho he was not in queſt of it, nor had any expectation of meeting with ſuch a thing, *he* however *hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and ſelleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field* [a]. The doctrine of the Goſpel, in the manner eſpecially wherein it was preached by Chriſt, had a power as well to excite reaſon, and awake it into exerciſe in thoſe, among whom it had been as it were buried in ſleep; as to exalt and improve it, where it had been in uſe. And therefore it is no wonder that thoſe, who *had been ſinners,* and thoughtleſs about *the things, which accompany ſalvation,* ſhould be ſurprized, and pleaſed, and perſuaded into a change of life, at its appearance; as well as thoſe, who had wanted it, and waited with deſire of its coming, ſhould be greatly improved by it, in that love of virtue, and preparation for eternity, which they had in part learned, and attained to before. It was an inſtrument deſigned by the goodneſs, and fited by the wiſdom of Almighty God, for this extenſive uſefulneſs and advantage to the world; and being the contrivance of ſuch a ſkilful agent, it would rather be a wonder, that it did not more completely anſwer its end, than that it did anſwer it ſo far; but that the power of vice over the wilfully wicked is a reaſon ſufficient to account for that failure.

The conſideration of faith, as owing to ſuch a conjunction of thoſe cauſes, which on the part of

[a] Matt. xiii. 44.

God, with thoſe which on our part contribute to the producing it, moſt clearly ſhews, how faith may be ſaid to be of the *operation of God*, and *his gift*; at the ſame time that it is ſaid to be *our own act*, and of the *operation of our reaſon*.

If from conſidering the cauſes we proceed to the conſideration of the nature and conſequences of true faith, it will further appear, how it ſtands connected with this power or principle of reaſon, and depends upon the exerciſe of it.

If by faith is meant no more than mere aſſent to the truth of a fact, or to the truth of a doctrine, and that aſſent grounded on no argument or evidence of the truth of either; it may be readily allowed, that reaſon has nothing to do with ſuch a faith, nor ſuch a faith with reaſon. But that this is not the faith of Chriſtianity, which is the proper ſubject of the preſent inquiry, does ſufficiently, I think, appear from what has been already ſaid on that head: and I muſt beg leave to add, that ſuch a notion of aſſent has no more to do with faith, than it has with reaſon; and that true faith may be what reaſon may lead us to, tho it be ever ſo certain it will never lead us to that. The natural tendency (for I meddle not with the deſign) of repreſenting the true faith of Chriſtianity as of this nature is to make it paſs either for a thing that is impoſſible, or for a thing that is abſurd: ſince in regard to thoſe, who admit it not into the mind without the warrant of their reaſon, it muſt neceſſarily be the one; and in regard to thoſe, who exerciſe it on the warrant of their paſſions, and their vices, it muſt neceſſarily be the other. The former will never come to faith in that notion of it, ſince it will be to them impoſſible; and ſubſiſting in the latter, it has nothing laudable in it, nor can be the effect or cauſe of what is ſo; but is merely an irrational act, the effect

fect of raſhneſs and folly. It has a tendency to incourage all manner of impoſture and ſelf deluſion, and is an inſtrument fited for the ſpreading of falſhood and vice over the world, and ejecting truth and virtue out of it. It may be a wiſe and worthy attempt to remove ſuch a faith as this out of mens minds; but it cannot be both a wiſe and honeſt one, to ſay that the faith of Chriſtianity is the ſame with it, and that they muſt remain or remove together. For by means of ſuch abſurd credulity of mind error and falſhood had ſupplanted the truth, occupied the place of it, and inchanted the world into the deluſions of idolatry; and without the advantage and influence of this blind and undirected aſſent ſuch a monſtrous heap of errors and impoſtures, as heatheniſm conſiſted of, could never have gained that early, extenſive, and long continued influence, which it had over mankind.

This great and general diſorder in the moral ſtate and condition of the world was the occaſion of God's ſending our Saviour into it; and the publiſhing and atteſting the doctrine of Chriſtianity was on his part, as the believing it was on man's, the deſigned means of rectifying and reforming it. The difference of that faith therefore, which Chriſt requires, from this blind and credulous aſſent, is manifeſt from the deſign there is in the command, and tendency there is in the exerciſe of the one to the overthrow of the other, and all the pernicious effects, which flow from it. And to ſay, that they are one and the ſame thing, is juſt ſuch an abſurdity, as ſaying, that the diſeaſe is the ſame thing with the remedy, that removes it, and drives it away.

Now that mere aſſent, falſely called faith, was ſo deſtructive in its conſequences, as to drown the world in error and deluſion, was owing to its diſ-

union and alienation from reaſon; and that true faith has this reſtoring influence, is owing to the affinity and alliance, which it has with it. And thence we ſee, how wiſe is the command, and how neceſſary the exerciſe of it to this happy effect. For as truth is relative to the faculty of reaſon, and diſtinguiſhable from falſhood by its diſcerning eye; and true faith is that aſſent to the truth of Chriſtianity, which riſes in the mind by the light of evidence, of a kind and degree proportionable to the gaining it, and afforded for that purpoſe; it follows, that faith, conſidered under the notion of aſſent, is of the operation of reaſon, connected with it as its principle, and dependent upon it as upon its moral cauſe.

As faith is of a gradual and progreſſive nature, ſmall at firſt, and riſing after to a grown and confirmed habit, by various ſteps and degrees; this ſhews it to be the effect of a ſearch and inquiry, which is conducted by reaſon, and owing to the gradual acquaintance men get with the contents and evidence of Chriſtianity, and the conviction they receive from thence of its truth. The faith, which is the effect of rational inquiry into the truth of any fact or propoſition, does come to exiſt after this manner in the mind, and is more or leſs quick or ſlow in its growth, as the nature or evidence of ſuch fact or propoſition is of a more or leſs ſimple or complex kind. Belief of the truth of all other facts or propoſitions is thus generated in the mind; and as the faith of Chriſtianity is of this nature, and thus ſprings in the mind, it carries with it, I think, ſome degree of probability, that this is an effect of the power and exerciſe of our reaſon, and what we come to in the ſame way (ſo far as depends upon us) as we do to the belief of any other facts or propoſitions whatever. For is it at all likely, that the faith of Chri-

Chriſtianity ſhould ſpring, and grow juſt in the ſame manner, as all other kinds of right faith do; and yet that reaſon, which is the cauſe of it in all other inſtances, ſhould have no power to conduce to it in this? that, tho it is able and ſufficient to the purpoſe in every other caſe, it ſhould here loſe its virtue, and be able to do nothing? What is there in the nature of Chriſtian faith, that ſhould render it thus averſe to all alliance with reaſon, and ſhy of owing any manner of obligation to it? This looks rather like the conduct of one, who goes between two friends, and, tho he profeſs friendſhip to both, is however a ſecret enemy to one or other of them; and tries, by inſinuations to each of them apart, to repreſent a diſaffection, and make a breach between them; when a common friend bringing them to an eclairciſſement, it appears, that they have a mutual and moſt cordial affection one towards the other.

This is farther confirmed by the conſideration of faith, as a permanent principle deſigned to abide and dwell in the mind, and fited to promote all holineſs of life in us; as will appear from the manner, in which it operates to the producing this effect. True faith influences us to all purity and virtue, as it is the actual conſideration of the authentic rule, and the application of the juſt reaſons and motives of ſuch a conduct to the mind: for by attending to the moral precepts of the Goſpel, diſcerning their authority as the declarations of the will of God, and hearkening to their ſweet and ſuaſive power as of inherent excellence, and attended with the promiſes of the greateſt rewards; we come to ſee their obligation in the cleareſt light, and to feel their inducement in its fulleſt force; and the obſervance of them appears to be the only way to the divine favour, and our own future and final felicity.

Now

Now as faith thus conſidered is converſant with the precepts of Chriſtianity, as the matter of our practice; and with its promiſes and other helps, as the motives of our virtue; what incapacity does reaſon lie under to diſpoſe and lead us to ſuch a conſideration of them? or how is it poſſible we ſhould ever come to ſuch a faith, without the previous and concomitant uſe of our reaſon? Does not reaſon tell us, that this object of our faith is the higheſt and worthieſt end, we can aim at? and that this exerciſe of it is the likelieſt and ſureſt method of purſuing it? And as faith could never have been firſt formed without the uſe of reaſon, as it was an effect of reaſon in its firſt inſtance, wherein the mind came to view the precepts and promiſes of the Goſpel in this light; and as its abiding influence to holineſs of life is but as it were a continued revival of the ſame view of them in the mind: reaſon muſt be of the ſame neceſſity to this laſting influence of faith, as it was to the firſt act of it; and faith muſt have this influence, and produce this effect, only by the continuance of that exerciſe of reaſon, by which it at firſt exiſted.

It does now, I think, ſufficiently appear, as well from the nature of reaſon and religion, as from that of faith, that reaſon is capable of leading us to faith; and that it is the principle intended by God to do ſo.

Before I proceed to examine the force of thoſe arguments, by which our author endeavours to eſtabliſh the contrary, I think, it may not be amiſs to conſider in this place, what is advanced by him on the head of doubting; from whence, as being admited upon the ſcheme of examination, he pretends to draw very great advantages againſt it.

His

His words are: "[a] If once you allow yourſelf in "doubting, I will take upon me to anſwer for the "conſequence, that you will never well believe." It is very poſſible, a man may undertake to anſwer for more, than he can make good; and very great forwardneſs is ſometimes rather a reaſon for caution than confidence. Doubting is here ſpoken of, as if it was a matter of the will, which men might take up, or lay down, at pleaſure; whereas there is nothing leſs ſubject to the power of the will, than this is. A man may be willing and deſirous to believe certain facts, which will remain matter of doubt to him in ſpite of all his deſires; and he may be as deſirous of doubting the certainty of others, which it will not be in his power to doubt of, and he muſt neceſſarily believe, whether he will or no. And the reaſon is, becauſe the faith of any facts has a neceſſary dependence upon the evidence of their truth perceived; and doubting as neceſſarily follows from the default, as faith from the ſufficiency of ſuch evidence and perception. What reaſon therefore can there be for aſſerting, that a man, who doubts of a fact, while he has no manner of evidence, ſhall be incapable of believing it, when he has the moſt ample and ſufficient? Which is juſt the ſame as to aſſert, that a man, who is incapable of ſeeing his way at midnight, ſhall be for that reaſon incapable of ſeeing it at noon day.

He adds: "[b] If once you come fairly to your "ſuppoſed ſituation for proving all things, be aſ-"ſured, that you will never hold faſt any thing." A thing is never the truer for being ſaid with aſſurance: and they muſt be very weak, who, when it is contrary to both reaſon and Scripture, are carried away with the mere force of it. Was there no difference between truth or falſhood, or no rules

[a] p. 5. [b] ibid.

rules to diſtinguiſh them, or were not we able to inveſtigate and apply them; all examination muſt needs be a vain and fruitleſs taſk, there could be no holding faſt, or even knowing what was good, were theſe ſuppoſitions true: but they are all contrary to the judgment and experience of mankind, as relating to any other ſubject; and why ſhould rational examination and inquiry be able to do ſo much for the diſtinguiſhing truth and falſhood in any other ſubject, and to do nothing of this kind in religion, which is a ſubject of univerſal neceſſity, and of far greater importance than any other whatever? That reaſon ſhould be able to ſettle the truth of any point of hiſtory, or philoſophy, or criticiſm, tho of an intricate nature, to our intire ſatisfaction; and yet not afford us any help at all in diſcovering the truth of ſuch moral doctrine, by which our lives are to be governed, and our ſouls to be ſaved, is manifeſtly abſurd: for it is to ſuppoſe, that God has furniſhed us with ample means of knowing, what we could do without; but none at all of coming to that knowledge, without which we are undone. Religious doctrines pretending both to ſuch authority to govern, and efficacy to ſave, have been publiſhed to the world, and gained great footing in it, of a very different nature, and as oppoſite to one another, as light and darkneſs. When Chriſt and his apoſtles preached the chriſtian doctrine to the world, it had the doctrine of the Phariſees, and that of the heathens, both doctrines of vice and wickedneſs, founded in groſs deluſion and impoſture, as open rivals and competitors to ſtruggle with; and both Jews and gentiles were called upon *to convert*: in ſuch caſe nothing more could or needed to be done on the part of man, than to exerciſe his reaſon, in order to diſcern the difference. Examination was the way to know the good from the bad. And if men did know

know this without acting agreeably, diſcovered the good without holding it faſt, it muſt have been owing to a defect of will, and not of power; to a want of honeſty, and not of ability, and charged not to the inſufficiency of examination, but to ſome other voluntary and criminal cauſe. It might juſtly be expected, that ſuch as were *diſpoſed to eternal life*, would be charmed with the contents, and convinced by the evidence of the Goſpel doctrine in the way of reaſon; and that even *ſinners* in the emphatical ſenſe might have their reaſon awakened into an hitherto unpractiſed exerciſe, and their minds brought into ſuch a diſpoſition, who had never had any experience of it before. And no evidence, or external operation, could have ſecured this effect of faith, otherwiſe than with the concuring exerciſe and operation of reaſon, out of which our capacity for faith and all virtue riſes, and with which it removes.

But he goes on: "[a] Is it not moſt abſurd to "require a belief, if previous examination be re"quiſite?" And, "If doubting be at all admit"ed, conviction can never ſure with any propriety "be inſiſted on." And, "If I am once left free "to examine, I can by no means be tied up in "the iſſue." The command to believe is ſo far from being inconſiſtent with examination, or excluding it, that it ſuppoſes, requires, and primarily reſpects it, as the very way in which faith is to be acquired. Where no examination can be made, either thro the want of matter to examine, or evidence to examine by, or capacity to examine with, faith is impoſſible; and to ſuppoſe a command from God to believe in ſuch circumſtances is abſurd and impious, as being repugnant to his moral character. Such command can only oblige

 thoſe,

[a] p. 5.

thoſe, to whom the contents and evidence of Chriſtianity are afforded, and on whom the power of examination is beſtowed; remove all, or any of theſe, and the command to believe no more agrees to or obliges men, than it does brutes. The faith therefore, which is the matter of the command, ſignifies principally what is voluntary in it, and depends upon the will. And examination, as being of this kind, is ſo far from being excluded by it, that it is what it properly and primarily refers to. He adds: "If doubting be at all admited, "conviction can never ſure with any propriety be "inſiſted on?" But why not? May not doubting be admited before acquaintance, or opportunity of acquaintance, with the evidence of Chriſtianity; and yet when that evidence is afforded, and examined, may it not be ſo ample and adequate to conviction, as that God, who knows this, may with great propriety inſiſt on it, in the way he does? Till that evidence of its truth appears, a man cannot help doubting; but when it is offered to his conſideration, and he impartially weighs it, it may be ſuch, as not to leave him capable of doubting any longer. If by doubting our author means a reſolution always to doubt, ſuch as excludes all examination; ſuch doubting indeed cannot be admited at all, and conviction with any propriety be inſiſted on; but he will ſcarce meet with any advocates of ſuch ſcepticiſm among thoſe, who are for a rational faith of Chriſtianity; and therefore this can with no propriety be objected to them. He has another form for this argument, but without giving it any more force: "If I am once, ſays he, "left free to examine, I can by no means "be tied up in the iſſue." But the ſame anſwer already given may ſuffice: for I am left free to examine, as the neceſſary means of conviction; and I am tied up in the iſſue, ſo far as ariſes from

from the near connection, that conviction has with examination. The hardſhip would rather lie in being tied up in the iſſue, and not allowed to examine; to determine cauſes according to juſtice, and not be allowed to hear evidence.

But he aſks: "[a] If ſcepticiſm be this neceſſary "qualification for the obtaining of a true faith, "how can we ever be ſecure, that it ſhall not im- "prove into direct unbelief?" No how indeed. If a man doubt only, and do no more, this is ſo far from being any ſecurity of it, that there is a certainty of the contrary. But if in conſequence of doubting he examine into the arguments offered to ground faith upon, may not the evidence of a true doctrine, which ſtands upon a level with falſe ones without examination, gain ſome advantage over them by means of it, and give ſome hopes, that tho the examination began with doubting, it may end in believing? There may be a moral certainty of this, ariſing from the concurrence of evidence, and exerciſe of reaſon in a way of examination. For truth and falſhood are eſſentially different: there are marks ſufficient, whereby to diſtinguiſh them from one another, and theſe diſcoverable and applicable by us to that purpoſe; I do not ſay, in the particular way of doubting indeed, but in the way of honeſt and careful inquiry. And one may reaſonably ſuppoſe, that men may thus diſcover them to be what they are, and may come by the means and in the iſſue of examination firmly to believe that, which they were before actually in doubt about. And I am inclined to think, there is ſcarcely any rational and thinking man, but is conſcious to himſelf of believing things, whereof he may remember himſelf to have been formerly in doubt. "Con-

 "viction

[a] P. 5.

"viction," it is true, "is a dubious and uncertain "conſequence" of the propoſal of a doctrine, concerning which "there is ground of debate;" not becauſe examination is inſufficient to diſcover the truth of what has evidence of its being true, but becauſe examination is neceſſary to conviction, and the entering into it depends upon the will; and it is dubious and uncertain, whether men will form and execute the reſolution of making it, or not. And ſo far as examination contributes to conviction, ſo far *conviction is an event dependent upon our will, an effect of our interpoſing power, in which we have a very different intereſt and concern, than as mere lookers on.* I proceed now to the next thing I propoſed, which is,

Thirdly, To reply to thoſe arguments, which our author makes uſe of, drawn from the nature both of reaſon and religion, to ſhew, that reaſon could not poſſibly be intended by God to lead us to true faith. It is aſſerted, that "reaſon cannot be the princi- "ple of faith, becauſe we are required to think "all alike. Can it be by the exertiſe of their "reaſon, that men can be required to think all "alike?"

That men ſhould come to think all alike, is an event, that reaſon has no power to ſecure: the different abilities, and advantages of men, are invincible difficulties in the way; and while they remain, it will be impoſſible for them to ſee things in the ſame light, and be all of them in every thing of the ſame opinion. But has the principle of faith more power to effect this, than the principle of reaſon? Are the underſtandings and advantages of all men reduced to an equality by faith, and thoſe obſtructions, which ariſe from their variety to render reaſon incapable of doing this, removed out of the way of faith? For if not, faith can no more prevent things appearing in a diffe-

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rent light to different underſtandings, than reaſon can; and great diverſity of opinion is as natural a conſequence of mens believing, as of their thinking for themſelves. And for the truth of this we may appeal to fact, and univerſal experience, no age of the world having afforded a proof or ſpecimen of this kind of unanimity among Chriſtians, more than among unbelievers. Is there not on the contrary as great a diverſity of opinions, and variety of ſects, in the church, as out of it? And do not private judgments run into as great latitude in the ſphere of faith, as within that of reaſon? But tho faith ſhould be able to bring us to think all alike, which reaſon confeſſedly is not; this would be no argument, why reaſon may not lead us to faith.

That men are required to think all alike, can be known only from the Scriptures, if it be true. It will be proper therefore to look into them, in order to ſee whether it be ſo, or not.

Chriſtians are there frequently required to be *of one mind*, to be *of the ſame mind*, to be *like minded one towards another*; and the determination of this queſtion in good meaſure depends upon the meaning of theſe expreſſions. And nothing is more clear, than that they have no manner of relation to mens thinking all alike, but to a very different and more excellent ſubject. The Greek words τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν, and τὸ αὐτὸ φρονεῖν εἰς ἀλλήλους and ἐν ἀλλήλοις, ſignify properly the moral habits and affections of our hearts towards one another; and denote an agreement among all Chriſtians mutually to exerciſe the virtues of benevolence, humility, and charity; and to promote that happy harmony and union, which ſubſiſts in ſociety, and ſubſiſts only upon this foundation. Difference of opinion there may be, and will be always among Chri-

Chriſtians; their religion neither excludes, nor blames, nor applies any remedy againſt it. But againſt the evil effects of it, ſtrife, contention, diſcord, and diviſion, this unity of mind is the abſolute and only one. For where theſe kind affections mutually reign in mens hearts, no difference of opinion can do any harm either to private Chriſtians, or to the community; and where they do not, of what value, or of what uſe can be the moſt perfect agreement in opinion? Good men, among whom there is this moral union, will live in perfect peace amidſt all their other differences; whereas wicked men, who are governed by their paſſions, will, tho all of one opinion, live in perpetual contention and ſtrife.

And that this is the meaning of the foregoing expreſſions, appears in ſome meaſure from the very form of the expreſſion itſelf, being *of the ſame mind one towards another*, which perfectly well agrees to the affections of humility, candor, condeſcenſion, and benevolence, which are mutual and relative actions; but what propriety is there in biding men be all of the ſame ſpeculative opinions one towards another? That this unity of virtuous affection is meant, and not an uniformity of opinion, is manifeſt from their different nature, as being, one of them poſſible, and the other not. If the thing is impoſſible, muſt not the exhortation to it be abſurd? Or had it been poſſible, how could it be the proper ſubject of exhortation, which is a form of addreſs to the wills of men, and is juſtly imployed about what depends upon them, as all theſe virtues do; but can be of no uſe towards changing their opinions, which depend not upon their wills, and which can only be affected by argument and conviction, and not by the means of perſuaſion and intreaty. As this moral union was a proper ſubject of exhortation,

ſo all the motives wherewith it is inforced, taken from their character as *brethren*, from the *deſign of God*, and from the *doctrine and example of Jeſus Chriſt*[a], are ſuch, as are applicable to it, and have a powerful influence to induce to this unity of moral affection; but have juſt the ſame force to perſuade men to be all of the ſame countenance, as to be of the ſame opinion.

It may be ſome indication of the meaning of theſe expreſſions, that they are always joined with other inſtructions, which are of a moral kind. It may not perhaps be improper to inſpect them in this place, that it may appear from their ſituation, they can have no aſpect towards uniformity of opinion[b].

This appears with ſome further degree of evidence from the exhortation, as it is directive of the conduct of *the ſtrong and the weak*[c] in the faith one toward another: by the former of which are meant ſuch Chriſtians, as had attained a more complete knowledge of the doctrine of Chriſt, and particularly as to the point of their freedom from the rites of the law of Moſes; and by the latter, ſuch who yet entertained ſcruples upon that head: both whom the apoſtle exhorts to behave in the exerciſe of every benevolent and charitable affection to one another, notwithſtanding the difference of their reſpective opinions. Now it would be extremely unſuitable to the nature of the caſe, to inculcate a rigid uniformity of opinion, and that in a manner which had no tendency to promote it, as exhortation has not. This would have been a likely method to ſet men of ſuch different attainments and ſentiments at variance, inſtead of bringing them to agreement; and is unworthy the apoſtle. But that he

[a] 1 Cor. i. 10. Rom. xv. 5, 6. [b] ch. xii. 16. xv. 5, 6, 7. 2 Cor. xiii. 11. Philip. ii. 2. iv. 2. Coloſ. iii. 2. [c] Rom. xv. 1, 5, comp. xiv. 1. ſeq.

he ſhould exhort both, whatever was the difference of their attainments in knowledge, to maintain this moral and mutual good temper, and be every one actuated by the moſt kind and benevolent affections, is perfectly agreeable both to the circumſtances of the caſe, and to the character of the apoſtle. This is that μία ψυχὴ, αὐτὸς νῶς, ἓν πνεῦμα, αὐτὴ γνώμη, recommended on theſe occaſions; each of which is uſed not only by the ſacred, but profane writers, to expreſs the bent and inclination of the will, as well as the opinion of the underſtanding.

The paſſage, which our author particularly points to [a], is as little to his purpoſe, as any of the forementioned. *Now I beſeech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jeſus Chriſt, that ye all ſpeak the ſame thing, and that there be no diviſions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the ſame mind, and in the ſame judgment. For it hath been declared unto me—that there are contentions among you. Now this I ſay, that every one of you ſaith, I am of Paul, and I of Apollos, and I of Cephas, and I of Chriſt. Is Chriſt divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were you baptized in the name of Paul* [b]? Their *ſpeaking the ſame thing* refers to the cuſtom prevailing among them of one ſaying, he was of Paul; another, that he was of Apollos; another, that he was of Cephas: and ſignifies, that they ſhould all call themſelves the diſciples of Chriſt. There is no mark of the apoſtle's blaming thoſe, who did ſo; nor is it conceivable, why he ſhould. On the contrary, in the ſequel of this ſame epiſtle, where he reſumes the argument, he is diſcourſing upon here, and reproves them for their confidence and boaſting in men, he ſays: *And ye are Chriſt's* [c]. *Therefore let no man glory in men, for all things are yours—*

[a] p. 65. [b] 1 Cor. i. 10—13. [c] ch. iii. 23.

yours—And ye are Chriſt's. Is it likely, he would reprove them in one place for ſaying *they were Chriſt's*, and almoſt immediately in another tell them, *they are Chriſt's*, when he is ſpeaking in both on the ſame ſubject? And the arguments he urges againſt their calling themſelves the diſciples of Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, do none of them hold againſt their calling themſelves the diſciples of Chriſt; but in reſpect to him they are reaſons of quite the contrary. *Is Chriſt divided? was Paul crucified for you? were ye baptized in the name of Paul?* are properly urged againſt thoſe, who called themſelves the diſciples of one or other of theſe miniſters; but are all ſo many arguments in defence of thoſe, who called themſelves the diſciples of Chriſt the maſter. This did not divide Chriſt. And Chriſt having been crucified for them, and they baptized in his name, were ſufficient reaſons, why they ſhould call themſelves his. Inſtead therefore of one ſaying, he was of Paul; another, that he was of Apollos; and a third, that he was of Cephas: he exhorts, that they all unanimouſly agree to ſay this one thing, *we are Chriſt's.* They had been rent into ſeparate and oppoſite parties, and warmly contended one againſt another. The deſign of the apoſtle was to apply a remedy for the removal of theſe *ſchiſms* (σχίσματα) and *contentions* (ἔριδες) from among them, *reduce them into union*, and make them one again; which is the proper meaning of the word καταρτίζεσθαι. This the mutual and moral affection of benevolence was the proper and only mean of; and this is, what the moſt abſolute agreement in mere opinion had no manner of power over.

All theſe places of Scripture lie in the writings of the apoſtle Paul, whoſe character and practice have nothing in them to favour the other ſenſe of

the words, as relating to unity of opinion among Chriſtians; nor exhibit any example of ſuch inflexible ſtiffneſs, as to require all to be of the ſame opinion: but afford a lively and lovely example of all thoſe virtues, out of the exerciſe of which this moral union ariſes. And it is abſolutely contrary, to what he has elſewhere delivered as his judgment in the caſe: *One man eſteemeth one day above another, another eſteemeth every day alike; let every man be fully perſuaded in his own mind* [a].

It is further argued: "[b] *That we are threatened into* " faith, *that it is a leſſon held out to us with a rod*, and " that *the doctrines of the Goſpel are tendered under* " *the reſtraints of threats and authority*. That *reaſon* " *is ever neceſſitated to determine juſt as ſhe does of* " *herſelf, and is by her nature incapable either of* " *paying compliments, or giving offence. We have no* " *free vote to diſpoſe of, and muſt therefore diſdain* " *with all juſtice an attempt equally weak and unjuſt,* " *of frightening us into a compliance out of* our " *power.*" The flow of this argumentation does, I think, conſiſt in this; that reaſon is uſed to ſignify the underſtanding only, and faith to ſignify only the aſſent of the underſtanding. If theſe premiſes were true, faith would be the effect and conſequence of reaſon, tho a neceſſary one; but if they are falſe, reaſon may have a power to lead us to true faith, and be the principle intended by God to do ſo; notwithſtanding any thing that is here ſaid to the contrary. For the perceptions of the underſtanding, abſolutely and in themſelves conſidered, may be neceſſary; and yet the deciſions of reaſon free. The faith of the Goſpel is a propoſal made to us, as indued with liberty, and complied with in the exerciſe of it. In making the propoſal our conſent is required to conſider the nature and evidence of the doctrine propoſed, as the

[a] Rom. xiv. 5. [b] p. 8, 9.

the object of faith; and being ſatisfied in theſe points (as, if we are not wanting to ourſelves, it may be juſtly preſumed we ſhall be) that we determine ourſelves to obey it. Reaſon is not merely the capacity of the underſtanding, nor is the propoſal of faith, tho made to the underſtanding, made to that alone; but to the mind, as indued with a ſelf determining power, as well as with the capacity of underſtanding and judgment. Propounding truths to be aſſented to by the underſtanding alone, with penalties and threats, would be abſurd enough; becauſe, if evidence ſufficient was afforded, they would be needleſs; and if it was not, they would be unjuſt: but the chriſtian religion is propoſed to that conſideration and acceptance, which we are free in giving; and is not matter of neceſſity, but of choice. Our believing, as it is required of us by God, is properly within our power, where *we have a free vote to diſpoſe of*: and the actual coming to faith, as well as the maintaining and improving the exerciſe of it to our holineſs and ſalvation, is a matter of liberty and virtue in us; as the refuſal or neglect to do ſo is criminal and ſinful. Penalties and threats have no power to inable us to decide queſtions of truth, and are improperly applied to ſuch end; but they may have power to ingage our attention, and awaken us to that exerciſe of reaſon, whereby they may be decided: and where we are capable, and concerned to decide them, are very wiſely made uſe of for that purpoſe; this being the deſign, and beſt uſe of our paſſions, to ſpur us up to activity in the laudable purſuit of truth and virtue. To propoſe a doctrine even to our reaſon, and only *threaten us into the conſequences of faith*; to give us ſuch *a leſſon*, and afford us *no other help*, but that of *the rod* to learn it with, would be an act of tyranny and

injuſtice, and be doing us an injury, of which we ſhould have the juſteſt reaſon to complain; and we know whoſe ways theſe are. But that a doctrine in itſelf true, that a doctrine coming from God, and having evidence ſufficient to make it appear ſo to men, may be tendered to them with a command to conſider it in order to conviction, and comply with it in conſequence of having obtained it, argues no injuſtice on the part of him who gives, nor injury done to the perſons receiving ſuch command; becauſe that conſideration and compliance is in their power, and is their duty, and may therefore be commanded with the authority and ſanctions of a law. Such law would not reſpect their underſtandings merely, nor do I know of any law of God, that does; laws, as ſuch, being directive of mens active and free powers. And that the faith required of us in the Scriptures is more the work of the will than the underſtanding, I have already ſhewn in deſcribing the nature of it. Faith and infidelity, as they are under the influence of mens wills, lie within the province of law, are the proper matter of command and prohibition: the one may as well be required with a penalty for neglect, as any virtue within their power to practiſe; and the other forbiden under the reſtraints of threats, as well as any vice, which they have a power to avoid. And that God or Chriſt ever inſiſted upon faith, and threatened any with penalties and puniſhments for not believing, who had it not in their power to believe, I am very well ſatisfied, cannot be ſhewn from the Scriptures. Our author ſays: "[a] *Theſe would be all ſo* "*many groſs and palpable abſurdities upon the face* "*of ſuch a commiſſion, if application were intended to* "*be made by it to the underſtanding.*" But what is this

[a] p. 9.

this to the caſe, where application is made to free agents; and faith, as it is the effect of a voluntary and equitable inquiry or attention, is what is required of men? which is the caſe in hand.

But he will not allow, that any *application is made to the underſtanding* at all; and this, he ſays, he *ſhall* "endeavour to evince, by looking a little "into life and practice upon the occaſion, by tra- "cing this faith to its known original, and point- "ing directly to the great root whence all our re- "ligious impreſſions notoriouſly ſpring." And muſt we indeed be concluded by this manner of proof? Is the chriſtian religion to be judged of, by what appears in the life and practice of thoſe, who make profeſſion of it? Is this a likely way to know, what the chriſtian religion is? And is it juſt, that it ſhould bear the blame of all the egregious follies and abſurdities, which paſs in the world under its name? He may look as much and as long as he pleaſes, and we may attend him in his ſearches, without ever having this point evinced from any thing, that is to be diſcovered in life and practice upon this occaſion. He may indeed be able to ſhew from thence, that men pretending *a commiſſion* to teach Chriſtianity make *no application by it to the underſtandings of men*, but indeavour to extinguiſh and put them out. Or he may be able to ſhew from thence, that many call themſelves *believers*, and pretend to *faith*, which neither their *reaſon nor underſtanding* have ever brought them to. And poſſibly he may ſhew, that ſome very trivial matter is *the known original, and great root, whence all the religious impreſſions* of great numbers of profeſſors *notoriouſly ſpring*. But will this prove, that the commiſſion ſuch men claim, is really from God, of like nature with that which Chriſt and his apoſtles acted with, and exerciſed in the manner, wherein they exerciſed theirs?

theirs? Will this prove, that the faith ſuch men boaſt of, is the true faith, which is required by God in order to ſalvation; and that reaſon cannot lead to true faith, nor be the principle, which God intended ſhould do it? And will it hence be evinced, that the *known original* and *great root*, whence *all the religious impreſſions* of ſuch perſons *notoriouſly ſpring*, is the *real original* and *true root* of that faith in Chriſt, which God requires, and ſincere Chriſtians exerciſe in him? If not, what is this conduct of our author, but *runing away from faith, in order to meet it; and turning his back upon it, in order to take a view of it?* He ſhould have looked a little into the Scriptures, from whence alone it can be known, what Chriſtianity, and the true faith of it is. Looking into life and practice among many, both teachers and profeſſors, is the way indeed to know what they are not, and may ſerve the purpoſes of miſrepreſenting their true nature; but can be no likely way to do them juſtice. It is like looking into the church of Antichriſt to find that of Chriſt, or into popery for the doctrine of the Scriptures, where they are hid, and to be found only by looking on the reverſe.

It is queried: "[a] Can a man be baptized into a "rational religion?" Can there be any inconvenience in anſwering in the affirmative? Were not men ordered to be baptized into the chriſtian religion? And muſt it not be either a rational, or an irrational one? And ſurely a man can as well be baptized into the former, as into the latter. The nature of Chriſtianity, as a rational religion, is, I think, as well delineated in the practice of baptiſm, as it is poſſible for reaſon to be repreſented in any rite. For conſidering it as carrying in its nature

[a] p. 9.

nature the promiſe of full forgiveneſs of ſins, that are paſt, and the obligation to complete holineſs for the future; how could any external rite of initiation, or manner of taking the profeſſion upon them, better ſerve to expreſs and repreſent them both, than the waſhing of the bodies of ſuch, as did ſo, with water? This was a proper ſymbol of that remiſſion, or cleanſing of them from guilt, which they injoyed by the tenor of the Goſpel covenant; and of that future purity of life and manners, to which they were obliged, and freely conſented, by it. In both theſe views Chriſtianity appears to be a rational religion: and why might not a man be thus baptized into it? Why might not the commiſſion to preach it be executed, and ſuch baptiſm required in an application to the underſtanding? Or how can any religion, that is worthy of God, and fit for mankind, be propagated without ſuch application?

But it is further queried: "[a] Where is reaſon "concerned, when babes accept the terms of ſal- "vation by deputy, and are intitled to all the pri- "vileges of the moſt extenſive faith by another's "act? By the baptiſmal ceremony they commence "true believers at once, and are made heirs of "heaven, you know, by the faith of their bondſ- "men; whilſt as yet they have not the leaſt ſhare "or ſymptom of underſtanding themſelves, and "may in all poſſibility never live to attain one; "and which, if they had at the time, I know not "yet, how they could well give a rational aſſent "by proxy. Yet ſuch is the pleaſure and ordi- "nance of God himſelf in this point." I do not wonder, that our author was for *looking into life and practice on this occaſion*, when what he wanted to find, was not to be met with in the Scriptures. It is

[a] p. 9.

is the principle of proteſtants, and rational believers, to look into the Scriptures as the ſole rule of their faith and practice, and not into the life and practice of any men living for their religion; as well knowing the very great difference of that, which is contained in the one, from what paſſes for ſuch in the other. And as our author, who uſually picks up ſome ſhreds and broken pieces of Scripture, which either of themſelves, or with a little art, are made to carry ſome ſound, tho that be all, in his favour, has not practiſed that method upon this occaſion; I do not ſee, what the chriſtian religion, or the rational believers of it, have further to do with theſe abſurdities, which he has ventured to charge them with, than to diſown and diſavow them, as they very well may. For where ſhall we find in the word of God any mention of *deputies*, or *bondſmen*, or *proxies*, in the *matters of ſalvation?* And if they are not there, what have we to do with them? Or how can they be ſaid to belong to Chriſtianity? We ſhould be apt to form an advantagious opinion of the beauty of a perſon, when we find that thoſe, who have indeavoured to decry it, have done it by keeping us from the ſight of the original, and preſenting us only with falſe copies. It may be ſome degree of credit to the chriſtian religion to obſerve the moſt wily of its enemies oppoſe it, by falſely aſcribing to it, what it never taught, and feigning abſurdities, which are no where to be found in it. Men never more ſhew the weakneſs, or that themſelves feel the weakneſs of the cauſe, which they eſpouſe, than when they are reduced to the method of miſrepreſenting what they oppoſe. Our author has gathered a heap of abſurdities, as it is very eaſy to do, from ſome modern formula's of religious doctrines, or the modern practice of ſome religious ſocieties, which are for the moſt part full of them; and

falſly charged them upon Chriſtianity. But whatever he is for looking to, I own, I am for looking to the law and to the teſtimony, and letting life and practice alone upon this occaſion; as knowing it to be a common thing with thoſe who look to them, to take the *precept* or *practice* of *man* for the *pleaſure and ordinance of God himſelf in any point.*

"The very firſt leſſon of philoſophy, the firſt "ſtep towards the uſe of our reaſon, is to explode, "under the name of prejudice, all the effect of "our education; which it is now, on the contrary, "the command of our holy religion, that we "ſhould induſtriouſly cultivate and improve."* There is a right and wrong in education as well as in other things, and a very great difference in the methods of it practiſed even by profeſſing Chriſtians; among ſome of whom it conſiſts in the culture and improvement of reaſon, as it does among others in the diſcouragement and diſuſe of it. Is it *the very firſt leſſon of philoſophy, the firſt ſtep towards the uſe of our reaſon, to explode, under the name of prejudice, all the effect of the* former? *Is it the command of our holy religion, that we ſhould induſtriouſly cultivate and improve all the effect of the* latter? or all the effect of our education, whatever that education has been? Provided our education has conſiſted in a proportionable acquaintance with the doctrine, and evidence of Chriſtianity, as it lies in the Scriptures, and as our mind became capable of underſtanding and judging of them; and if our religion command us to cultivate all that acquaintance with the doctrine of the Goſpel, and conviction of its divinity, into a firm principle of faith and holineſs: what is there to be found fault with in ſuch a command, or in ſuch a conduct? What philoſophy is it the firſt leſſon of to explode

* P. 9.

under the name of prejudice all the effect of such an education? But if on the contrary our education has been formed upon *life and practice*, if it has consisted in learning and blindly receiving the creeds, catechisms, or other compositions of fallible men, and being taught to take the doctrines thereof for the truths of Christianity, upon no arguments, but the authority of those, who compiled, or authorised, or acquainted us with those systems; such education consists in folly and falshood, and to cultivate all the effects of such education would be to confirm ourselves in the absurd delusions and mistakes, which others had led us into, and which God knows is the case of myriads. But where does our holy religion command any such thing? If our author had put *holy church* in the room of *holy religion* here; as is often done, when there is not so just a reason for it, there would have been more truth and justice in his remark, and I should have had as little inclination as cause to controvert it.

It is further argued to shew the inability of reason to lead us to faith, that "we are commanded to cultivate it in a method conformable exactly to that of its implanting, by application to heaven, and not to the schools; by the use of prayer, and not of reason: a fresh instance from the manner of its culture, that reason was to have originally no share in making the graft. "We are to pray for increase of our faith." This argument is built upon the words of *the apostles*, who said *unto the Lord, increase our faith.* It is not absolutely certain, that all the sentiments or words of the apostles, antecedent to their full instruction in Christianity, were exactly agreeable to the nature of it; and to argue from every expression

ſion or practice of theirs within that period, as if it was an eſſential maxim of chriſtian doctrine, or neceſſary branch of chriſtian duty, is by no means concluſive. Two of them either made or cauſed a prayer to be made to Chriſt in their behalf, *that they might ſit one of them on his right, and the other on his left hand in his kingdom*; but was this any part of their duty, or wiſdom? or is it an example, which others are bound to imitate? Peter would by no means allow our Saviour to come under the power of his enemies, and was for fighting to prevent it; but was he right in his reſolution, and a pattern to be copied after, when our Saviour called him *Satan* for his pains, and told him, *he ſavoured not of the things which were of God, but thoſe which were of men?* Philip prayed, that the Father might be ſhewn him: *Lord, ſhew us the Father, and it ſuffiecth.* The apoſtles appear in all theſe inſtances to have been greatly defective in their knowledge and acquaintance with the chriſtian doctrine, and to have entertained ſentiments in no wiſe fit to be taken for parts of it. They appear at other times to have been alſo defective in the point of faith, for which reaſon our Saviour often addreſſes them as perſons *of little faith.* And does not the manner, in which he frequently expoſtulates with them on that head, ſhow, that it ought to have been greater, that it was in ſome degree in their power to have made it ſo, and that its not being ſo was in great meaſure their fault, and owing to their neglect? Thus at one time, being in doubt of their ſafety, when they were in the preſence of Chriſt in a ſtorm at ſea, he ſays to them: *Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith*[a]*?* At another time, to Peter walking on the water at the command of Chriſt, and fearing he ſhould

[a] Matt. viii. 26.

ſink: *O thou of little faith, wherefore didſt thou doubt*[a]? And again, when they ſeem to have diſtruſted Chriſt's power of feeding them, he ſays to them: *O ye of little faith, why reaſon ye among yourſelves, becauſe ye have brought no bread*[b]? And he aſſigns their *unbelief* as the cauſe, why upon a particular occaſion *they were not able to caſt out a demon*[c]. And poſſibly it might be upon ſuch an occaſion as this, that this prayer for the *increaſe of their faith* was made to him. But granting it to be the true faith of Chriſtianity that is meant here, and that the apoſtles acted agreeably to its nature in praying for an increaſe of it; as they were ſo defective in the meaſures of their faith, and ſo juſtly ſenſible of it, as by this prayer they ſeem to have been; why might they not pray to the Lord for the increaſe of it, and act rationally too in ſo doing? For tho our author affects to ſet them in oppoſition, there is nothing in the nature of *reaſon* or *prayer*, but what ſhows them to be perfectly conſiſtent with one another, and that the latter is a natural and noble exerciſe of the former; tho I ſhould not care to anſwer for the like agreement between the method of making application to heaven, and that of making it to the ſchools for that end.

It does not, I think, appear from its being our duty to pray for the increaſe of faith, that reaſon has no power or influence in procuring it: for as, in its firſt riſe, it is an effect of the concurrence of thoſe cauſes, which on the part of God, and on that of man himſelf, have been ſhown to contribute to it, and without which concurrence the event cannot be ſecured; ſo its increaſe and growth to a full complement is owing to the continued and united operation of the ſame cauſes: and

[a] Matt. xiv. 31. [b] ch. xvi. 8. [c] ch. xvii. 20.

and as neither the revelation of the whole chriſtian doctrine, nor the intire evidence of it was yet afforded them, their faith of it muſt neceſſarily have been as yet imperfect, and they may be ſuppoſed with great propriety to have prayed for the perfection of it; which, as far as it depended upon the further means to be afforded them by God or by the Lord Jeſus, was a reaſonable matter of prayer to them. To aſſert therefore, that, becauſe the increaſe of faith is the matter of prayer, it cannot be the work or effect of reaſon, is the ſame thing as to ſay, that, becauſe wiſdom and wealth, proſperity and honour are the bleſſings of God, they cannot be the fruit of our labour or induſtry, or what we can contribute any thing to the acquiſition of. We may in both caſes contribute as rational creatures to the ſecurity of theſe events, without arrogating too much to ourſelves, or denying God the glory of being the primary and principal author of them; ſince in both caſes we do nothing but by the powers he has given us, and by the aſſiſtance he affords us, without which we could never with all our indeavours either arrive at the injoyment of temporal felicity, or attain the exerciſe of that true faith which leads us to eternal. By reaſon therefore we are, in a due ſubordination to the influence of God, acceſſories as well to the growth as to the ground work of faith; without which ſuppoſition it is not eaſy to diſcover, how either the exerciſe of it can turn to a good account, or the want of it to a bad one, to any men whomſoever.

" [a] But if prayer be the effectual means propo-
" ſed for the attaining the perfection of our faith,
" there is a ſtrong preſumption too, that our la-
" bours of every kind were to be ſpared through-
" out

[a] p. 10.

" out the whole progreſs, and that it was to be " introduced in a like manner by methods purely " divine, and without any of our aſſiſtance." Allowing that prayer is a preſcribed means, and of proper efficacy for the attaining the perfection of our faith, which however nothing, he has yet ſaid, has any tendency to prove; it would by no means follow, that it was the only means, or that it could of itſelf alone produce that effect. We have at leaſt as plain and poſitive a direction of our Saviour to pray to God for our daily bread, and as juſt reaſon to think it will be of efficacy to procure it; and will it from thence follow, that prayer alone is ſufficient to our obtaining it? *Would it not be ſtrong* and mere *preſumption* to aſſert, *that our labours of every other kind were* intirely *to be ſpared, that it was to be* obtained *by methods purely divine, and without any of our aſſiſtance?* A man, who will act upon this reaſoning as to his bread, may pray and periſh with hunger, *if his labours of every other kind are ſpared*; notwithſtanding that the bleſſing of God may have its proper efficacy to that end, in conjunction with his labours, and that prayer may be the preſcribed and effectual method of procuring that bleſſing. But, " [a] That we are to addreſs ourſelves to heaven to " inculcate the full complement of our belief, will " help us to a juſt and uniform account of its " whole nature; whilſt it points readily back to " its ſource of baptiſm." Addreſſing ourſelves to heaven for the perfecting our faith implies, that it is an event depending upon heaven, that we are perſuaded of its being ſo, and deſirous of the concurrence of heaven in bringing it about. So far as the action of God concurs to the producing faith, the command to pray for it helps us to an account

[a] p. 10.

account of faith, and points us to his grace, as the true ſource, from whence it originally flows; and hence indeed its original is, and *its firſt ſeeds are not of human extraction.* It is not reaſon but grace, that *founds it.* God in infinite goodneſs formed the deſign of bringing men to faith in order to ſalvation, and in infinite wiſdom the methods of effecting it, and with the united exerciſe of his divine power publiſhed them to the world, with every awakening conſideration to attend, and receive, and improve the overture. If, after his ſo doing, men are found to attend to it in the exerciſe of their reaſon, and in conſequence are convinced, and come to cloſe with it; can reaſon upon ſuch account be ſaid to found faith? Is reaſon the principal, and grace the acceſſory cauſe in this view? And whether is it more likely, that this exerciſe of grace on the part of God does ſuppoſe and require the uſe of reaſon on the part of man for the accompliſhing its purpoſe, or ſuperſede and ſet it aſide, as intirely uſeleſs to it?

"It is impoſſible ſurely, when we conſider to "whom we muſt aſcribe them, that any ſuch ab"ſurd ſchemes can any longer be ſuppoſed; that "we can ever imagine, that the great author and "finiſher of our faith ſhould have contrived us "a *rational* one, to be afterwards ſuperſeded, or "even confirmed by an *irrational* one."

"In what light muſt a rationaliſt again regard "all application by prayer for the confirming and "continuing us ſtedfaſt in the faith?" I do not find any example in the Scripture of prayer in theſe words, or any direction for uſing them. But granting it to be our duty to *pray* to God *for the confirming and continuing us ſtedfaſt in the faith*, it is in no wiſe inconſiſtent with the uſe and efficacy of our own reaſon to that purpoſe. For there are many cauſes, which not only hinder men from coming

coming to faith, but turn them aſide, and prevent their continuance in it, after they have attained it; which, as they come under the influence of divine providence, it is therefore proper for us to pray for its aſſiſtance againſt. Not only does St. Paul ſpeak of thoſe, *who having put away a good conſcience had concerning faith made ſhipwreck*[a]; and St. Peter of ſome, who *led away with the error of the wicked fall from their ſtedfaſtneſs*[b]: but our Lord himſelf with a very great concern ſpeaks of offences, as what cannot, agreeably to the methods of God's moral providence, be prevented; and ſuppoſes, that men by raiſing perſecutions, and ſpreading falſe doctrines, may overturn the faith, and ſubvert the virtue of many, in whom they ſubſiſted but in an infirm ſtate[c]. Such men were then, and have too often been in the world, who had malice enough to form, and power to execute their wicked purpoſes. And as theſe are temptations and inducements to men to *withdraw from the faith*, a rational believer may *look* upon *prayer* for his *continuing ſtedfaſt* in it, in the *ſame light*, as he does upon that part of our Lord's prayer, *Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil*; God having it in his power, tho' he does not prevent them, to order many circumſtances ſo, as to prevent their evil influence upon ſuch, as ſincerely pray to him for it. And that any ſuch command or exerciſe of prayer for continuing ſtedfaſt in the faith does not at all ſuperſede the influence of our own indeavours, is manifeſt from the frequent exhortations in the Scriptures, wherein it is repreſented as our own action and duty. St. Paul exhorts to *continue in the faith, grounded and ſettled*[d]. St. Peter exhorts to *reſiſt the devil, ſtedfaſt in the faith*[e]. And the author to the Hebrews

[a] 1 Tim. i. 19. [b] 2 Pet. iii. 17. [c] Luke xvii. 1.
[d] Coloſ. i. 23. [e] 1 Pet. v. 9.

Hebrews ſays: *We are made partakers of Chriſt, if we hold the begining of our confidence ſtedfaſt to the end* [a]. And our Lord himſelf, when he directed his diſciples to pray to God, *lead us not into temptation*, was far from intending, that *all our labours of every other kind ſhould be ſpared*; as appears from his directing them at another time to *watch*, as well as to *pray*, *that they enter not into temptation* [b].

What ground there was therefore to connect our *praying* upon this account, with [c] *diſavowing in the fullneſs of our conviction all future uſe of reaſon for our ſecurity*, I do not perceive: ſince I can no more conceive of the exerciſe of prayer without that of reaſon attending it, than I can of a man's living without breathing; nor how faith can be kept ſtedfaſt by the ſole means of prayer, any more than how a man can live by breathing only. Such a *faith* indeed, as *derives merely from baptiſm*, has that for its *ſource*, and *nothing elſe*, may poſſibly be in this manner ſupported; being of an irrational original, it may be *cultivated in a method conformable exactly to that of its implanting*: but for ſuch ſource, and ſuch ſupport of faith, we muſt, I imagine, look ſomewhere elſe than in the Scriptures. A man, who has been led to faith in the exerciſe of his reaſon, is not likely to ſuſpect its ability, or renounce its aſſiſtance, for continuing him ſtedfaſt in it; and if in the joint uſe of prayer and reaſon, perfectly conſiſtent, he goes on in purſuit of that end, this is ſo far from a *wilful ſolliciting his favourite prejudices*, or a *blind and fooliſh obſtinacy*, that it is the wiſeſt precaution againſt them, and defence againſt danger from them; it is a firm and intelligent attachment to a juſt perſuaſion, founded

[a] Heb. iii. 14. [b] Matt. xxvi. 41. [c] p. 10.

on the authority of God himſelf, and formed by the direction of his holy word.

" [a] In fact ſo ſtrictly is this irrevocable conſtancy " in our profeſſion, this utter deafneſs to all fur- " ther ſollicitation for diſcipleſhip required of all " Chriſtians, that we are warned, tho even an an- " gel from heaven were to preach any new doc- " trine to us, to give not the leaſt heed or credit " to his pretenſions; and yet what is there in the " utmoſt of reaſon's aſſurances to falſify, or con- " front ſuch a preacher? What is there, that the " nature of any external evidence can poſſibly af- " ford us, that has not more than a balance in " ſuch an authority?" Why, ſuch a declaration as that of St. Paul under the authority of a revelation, which has all that internal and external evidence, as the chriſtian religion has, cannot have a balance in the mere teſtimony, or authority of any angel from heaven whatever. What is the teſtimony of an angel from heaven, compared to that, which the God of heaven himſelf has given to the truth of the doctrine, which Chriſt taught? And ſurely it may be ſaid without any preſumption, that no greater can be given to any other doctrine whatever; nor that to any, that is contrary to his.

Another argument inſiſted on to prove, that reaſon could not be deſigned by God to lead to faith, is, that we are " [b] *to be taught it in our child-* " *hood.* If the aſſent he required, were to be a ra- " tional one, it would be highly wicked and unjuſt " to prepoſſeſs mens tender minds in any manner, " before they came to the full uſe of their rational " faculties: but now that we are actually com- " manded with early diligence to retain our chil- " dren, as ſo many ſure votaries to the cauſe we " profeſs

[a] p. 11. [b] ibid.

" profeſs ourſelves; it is plain, that a rational aſ-
" ſent is by no means calculated for, or expected
" at our hands." The education of tender minds in regard to chriſtian truth and virtue is a matter of very great conſequence, that muſt be conducted with prudence to be crowned with ſucceſs. But a man, who is himſelf acquainted with the doctrine and evidence of Chriſtianity, as they lie in the Scriptures, is thereby qualified to introduce others into an acquaintance therewith; and by how much the more thoroughly he is furniſhed with it himſelf, by ſo much the more eaſily and ſucceſsfully is he inabled to impart it to others. By obſerving the manner in which it has ſprung up in his own mind, he will be led to the means of gradually uſhering it into the minds of children, as they ſhall become capable of receiving it. It is true, it would be highly wicked to *prepoſſeſs tender minds* in favour of any opinions without any juſt grounds, or upon falſe ones. I know of no neceſſity there is of inſtiling any matters of belief into the minds of children, before they are of capacity to conceive the grounds, upon which they ſtand; the doing of this is one of the chief cauſes of ſo much falſe opinion, and implicit belief, as is current in the world. Surely children come to ſome uſe of reaſon, before they come to the full uſe of it; and are capable of receiving ſome kind of truths with their rational grounds, before they are capable of all: ſince knowledge and faith are acquired by degrees, and ſome truths, and ſome arguments, of eaſier communication and conception than others. Leading them into an acquaintance with the doctrine and evidence in a way of rational inſtruction, and conviction, cannot be *prepoſſeſſing them*; and the indeavour to *retain* them after this manner *the ſure votaries of the chriſtian cauſe* has a very great probability, tho it can have no abſolute

certainty, of ſucceſs. Our author's argument therefore being built on the ſuppoſition, that rational conviction is what cannot take place in the tender minds of children, whilſt reaſon and experience do fully ſhew, that it may; it will follow, on the contrary to what he aſſerts, that a rational aſſent is calculated for us, and may be expected at our hands. And if God *command us with early diligence to retain our children*, with all the certainty we can, *votaries to the cauſe* of the chriſtian religion, and there is no other method, wherein this can poſſibly be done; he does as effectually command our uſe of this method, as our purſuit of this end.

Notwithſtanding all this care that is taken in the education of tender minds, we muſt ſay, that [a] *a mind has ſtill the uſe of his reaſon improving upon him to aſſiſt him afterwards in the ratifying, or reverſing, his parents inſtructions, as he ſhall* find juſt cauſe. A child thus trained up in the knowledge of the truth, and the rational grounds of it, muſt in the nature of the caſe be led and eſtabliſhed in ſuch a freedom of mind. To take care all along to eſtabliſh our inſtructions upon rational grounds is inconſiſtent with repreſenting *all future diſcoveries and alterations*, whatever ſuch grounds of doing it may appear, *as ſomewhat beyond meaſure heinous and deteſtable*; ſince we are not infallible, and cannot foreſee, what of ſuch kind may in the courſe of futurity turn up to the mind. God indeed, who knows infallibly the competency of theſe grounds, upon which faith is required, and can with certainty ſee, that none can ever occur ſufficient to overturn it, may, in view of the ſufficiency of what is at preſent offered to build our faith upon, and the inſufficiency of whatever can occur to ſubvert it, juſtly

ſo

[a] p. 12.

ſo command us; and ſo far as we can be ſure of our acting in perfect concurrence with ſuch command, we may inculcate it on the ſame account upon the minds of thoſe, we are intruſted with the care of: but to repreſent all diſcoveries and alterations whatever in ſuch leſſons, as we teach on our own, or any human authority, as ſomething beyond meaſure heinous and deteſtable, is a conduct the moſt injurious to truth and virtue, and the minds of thoſe, towards whom it is obſerved; and to ſuppoſe it a branch of truly rational and ſcriptural education is quite inconſiſtent with the juſtice due to it. For tho this may be the method of training up young minds in a ſervile reception and ſubmiſſion to impoſture, or human impoſitions, which hate, and have reaſon to fear the light; yet this is not the nature of a liberal education in the divine doctrines of truth and virtue. A perſon trained up in an acquaintance with the difference between truth and falſhood, between virtue and vice, and their reſpective rational grounds and evidences, is indeed trained up to a habitude and inclination not to confound them, not to take one for the other, not to exchange his ſentiments and conduct, but upon the moſt warrantable reaſons; and if ſuch ſhould occur, to train him up to neglect them is to train him up in abſurdity: but to educate him in an openneſs and readineſs of mind to judge and act upon ſuch grounds, as they ſhall appear to him, is a liberty, to which he ought to be, and may ſafely be left. And this is a conduct to which that of educating children in opinions, which are built on no other ground than mere human authority, and which they are taught a horror and deteſtation of ever departing from, and an utter deafneſs to whatever reaſons may be offered for their ſo doing, is not worthy to be compared; how much leſs to be prefered?

If

If any ſhould be ſo unhappy, as to be trained up in this method, and " [a] upon notice from his " ſureties of the conditions, they had ingaged him " in, ſhould think of appealing, or making any " further ſearch for the certainty of that know- " ledge, in which he had been inſtructed, and " poſitively refuſe to ſtand to what they had done " in his name, till they had laid the grounds and " reaſons of their proceedings before him to his " ſatisfaction," or he had inquired into them for that purpoſe; he would be ſo far from deſerving the odious character of a *perverſe apoſtate*, that he muſt truly be looked upon, as in great meaſure a ſtranger to Chriſtianity till he had done ſo: his ſo doing would be a neceſſary ſtep to his becoming a real or rational Chriſtian; and it is not thoſe, who do this, but thoſe who do not, who are in danger of deſerving the character of aliens from the faith of Chriſt; tho not perhaps of receiving it from ſome certain quarters.

" [b] There is not one argument from reaſon," nor from any principle, that it is warrantable to act upon, " why a man ſhould not return to neu- " trality the firſt moment he begins to think for " himſelf." Neutrality, this author obſerves, " is " a term ever of the juſteſt horror and deteſtation " in the ears of a true believer." A neutrality of behaviour between virtue and vice, between countenancing and cruſhing Chriſtianity in a man convinced of the truth of it; or a neutrality of mind, which alienates a man from all examination and inquiry into a religion of ſuch importance, as Chriſtianity is, when it is fairly propoſed to him; is to ſuch *a term of the juſteſt horror and deteſtation:* but ſuch a neutrality of mind between any other religion and the chriſtian, or between an ignorant and blind profeſſion and a cordial and cheerful obedience

[a] p. 12. [b] ibid.

ence of that, as ſubſiſts only in order to examination, and ſubſiſts no longer, than while the examination is making, is ſo far from being *a term of horror and deteſtation to true believers*; that they would be glad to have it take place in every one prepoſſeſſed with a religion, they think falſe, or totally ignorant of what they take to be the true one. Would not ſuch a neutrality have been a great advantage to the preachers of Chriſtianity, and a furtherance of the faith of it in the minds of thoſe Jewiſh or gentile people, to whom it was firſt propoſed? To caſt out the rational method of believing, and look upon it with horror, may be required by ſuch, who have an impoſture ſet on foot; and complied with by thoſe, who concern not themſelves, whether what they believe, be an impoſture, or not. And they, who profeſs even a true religion, originally built upon rational grounds, and have themſelves eſtabliſhed it on a different foundation, and have led the people into a belief of it on that falſe bottom, are likely to be for keeping the rational grounds of it out of their ſight; leſt coming to the knowledge of them they ſhould ſee the abſurdity, and hurtful conſequences, of having religion ſtand upon any foot but its own. But as the truly rational and ſcriptural method of propagating faith is very different from this, it cannot be intereſted in, or juſtly anſwerable for the abſurdities, it is chargeable with. Training up children, as God ſays Abraham would his, *to do juſtice and judgment*; or as Solomon ſpeaks, *in the way they ſhould go*; or as St. Paul exhorts, *in the nurture and admonition of the Lord*; is a quite different thing from training them up in the belief of doctrines, which are commanded to be aſſented to, or the practice of rites, which are commanded to be obſerved by any civil or church law whatſoever.

It

It is further urged: "[a] Examination in the very "term implies a ſuſpenſe of conviction; and "therefore if religion admits at all of examina- "tion, it muſt neceſſarily admit of (at leaſt a tem- "porary) diſbelief." Such a doubt, whether the Goſpel be true or falſe, as ariſes from neceſſary ignorance of thoſe arguments, by which its truth is evinced, is as neceſſary on the one hand, as the aſſent to its truth upon the appearance and apprehenſion of their force is on the other; and being both neceſſary, there can no more be a fault in the one, than any virtue in the other. When our Saviour required examination of any, what he meant, we muſt neceſſarily ſuppoſe, was a ſincere one; and was there any danger of God's paſſing a ſevere ſentence upon ſuch doubt only, as was neceſſarily implied in ſuch ſincere examination? Where is the abſurdity of admiting doubt during the time, wherein it is impoſſible not to doubt? Or where is the ingenuity of infering from its being admited, whilſt it is out of our power to remove it, that we may continue on doubting, after the moſt ample means of removing it are afforded us?

"[b] Tell me then, I beſeech you, you that con- "tend ſo earneſtly for a rational belief, ſince the "firſt motions of doubt are, it ſeems, but neceſ- "ſary preparations in your ſcheme, and therefore "not in themſelves criminal; by what authority "(if the evidence happens never to take effect) "can a man be obliged ever to be reſolved?" A man may be obliged to be reſolved by the authority of God in ſuch caſe, where he knows he has afforded him ſufficient means to reſolve him in a rational way; and he can certainly know, whenever that is the caſe, and where it is ſuch, there can be no diſpute about the juſtice of the command. It is not reaſonable to think, that God will oblige any

[a] p. 12. [b] p. 13.

any man to be reſolved, when he knows him to be deſtitute of the neceſſary means; but if a man provided with thoſe means, which an honeſt uſe of is ſufficient to bring him to a clear determination, and he ſhall poſtpone all examination in a caſe, where the importance of the matter is inviting, and the authority requiring it is competent; and go on fluctuating in doubt all his days: what reaſon can we have to think hardly of God, if condemnation be the conſequence of ſuch a conduct, and the man was before informed of it as a motive of diſſuaſion?

But, " if doubting be indeed one moment allowable, who ſhall aſcertain the preciſe time " for ſuming up the evidence and pronouncing " ſentence? Who ſhall take upon him to ſettle " the laſt lawful point of heſitation, making the " proper indulgence for the tardy apprehenſion, " and exacting a more ready deciſion from the " more capable."

Doubting is neceſſary, where information is wanting; and ſo long as it is wanting, doubting muſt continue. And as information is communicated, and doubting removed in imperceptible degrees, it may be impoſſible for us to aſſign, nor is there any neceſſity or advantage of aſſigning the ſeveral ſteps, by which the one advances, and the other declines; or the preciſe time, when faith enters, and doubt removes out of the mind. It is no man's province, but God's only, to *ſettle the laſt lawful point of heſitation*, making proper allowance for the different talents and advantages of men; and however great be the taſk of doing this in the different and various caſes of mankind, no one can ſay, that this is a difficulty with God.

Suppoſe it *requires time*, what better deſerves it? What is our reaſon or our life for, and what can be a worthier imployment of both, than the prac-

tice of that virtue, which will lead us to heaven, and the exerciſe of that faith, which will lead us to virtue? What is there in its nature more fited to give delight, than growing acquaintance with truth and holineſs, and the encreaſing evidence of immortality and happineſs? And tho it take up our life to acquire ſuch a faith, and ſuch a virtuous character, as faith is to produce; our life and reaſon have then anſwered their end, and there is nothing, to which they can be better devoted. It is not from thus imploying them, but from neglecting and not doing it, that men will hereafter find cauſe to be diſſatisfied with themſelves. And at preſent, I ſhould imagine, the importance of the matter ſhould be a ſpur to examination, as the integrity of the examiner will be one to his diſpatch.

But, "[a] rational faith may not come time "enough to regulate our practice." God has made it the duty of parents towards their children to educate them well in their tender years, and to watch over their minds, while reaſon is in its ſpring; as well as he has made it theirs, to govern themſelves well in their advanced age, and act by reaſon, when it is grown mature. All arguments againſt the power of reaſon, and the uſe which God deſigns ſhould be made of it, muſt, to conclude, be taken from the nature of it, as cultivated and improved in the manner he has directed, and for which he has impowered us; and any ſuch arguments would be worthy our attention: but arguments drawn from the weakneſs of reaſon, under groſs neglect both of our parents, and of our own, are unfairly urged, and have no manner of force againſt its power and uſe, as cultivated and improved both by our parents, and ourſelves, in the manner God requires.

If

[a] p. 13.

If the duty of parents in educating their children, which is a leading cauſe of their wiſdom and virtue, was duly obſerved; it would lay ſuch a foundation in the early years of their life for the rational faith and practice of Chriſtianity, as would take off much of the force of this argument, if it did not intirely remove it; and the work of life would be greatly advanced in that early ſtage of it, which, if it be a ſeaſon of trifles, induces an indolence fatal to inquiſitiveneſs, examination, and virtue; and, if it be a ſeaſon of vitious paſſions and habits, does greatly enlarge both the matter and difficulty of their duty, while it ſhortens and abridges the time they have to do it in. The time of childhood and youth is the proper and preſcribed part of life for caſting the ſeeds of knowledge and virtue into the mind, and introducing the ſimple and plain principles of truth and right conduct. This muſt be done, as their capacities can receive it, which in ſome are larger and ſooner ripe than in others: and this being done will effectually ſuperſede and prevent ſcepticiſm, not by introducing brute opinion, and blind credulity, which, if not worſe, is as bad; but uſeful knowledge, and ſolid wiſdom.

Now if this be the caſe, a man need not *go long without his religious determinations, nor will they come too late to anſwer the end, for which they are deſigned, to influence our actions, and direct our conduct thro life:* the remedy againſt hurtful and vitious paſſions will grow up with, or rather get the ſtart of them; and reaſon will be inabled to form its judgments and reſolutions requiſite to the reſiſtence and conqueſt of them. The reviewing the grounds of our knowledge and conduct, ſo far from miſbecoming us, will be what we ſhall be diſpoſed to by ſuch an education, and what we are not only allowed at any one particular time, but obliged

to do often, over and over again, as long as we live. How far impoſture and human impoſition might ſuffer by their votaries taking ſuch a liberty, is eaſily ſeen; and why thoſe, who are for ſupporting them, ſhould be apprehenſive and fearful from it: but chriſtian faith and virtue muſt take firmer hold of the minds of men, and flouriſh more in their lives by it.

Beſides the care, which God has laid upon parents in the education of their children, if he has alſo appointed a ſtanding miniſtry in the chriſtian church for the edification of its members; it ſhould ſeem, as if this, than which nothing, that men can do for promoting Chriſtianity, can contribute more to it, was within their commiſſion, and within their power, and ought to be in their care to ſet forward and ſecure. But ſince Chriſtianity has been eſtabliſhed under human forms, with the ſanction and authority of civil laws, and a clergy has been ſettled as a principal part of ſuch religious eſtabliſhments; the plan of religion has been greatly altered, and the work of its miniſters greatly enlarged. By this means defending the rights of thoſe, who have eſtabliſhed it, the method in which it has been done, and the dignities and emoluments, with which they have been ſettled upon this new foundation, have much taken them off from attendance to thoſe offices, to which they were obliged upon the antient ſcriptural one. And as the plan of religion has been greatly altered, the method of education has undergon a great change by it; ſince, inſtead of teaching the principles of reaſon and the holy Scripture, it has hereby been made to conſiſt in teaching the manner and matter of ſuch eſtabliſhments, which in many things are evidently contrary to both. And if parents of families, and paſtors of churches, inſtead of concuring in ſuch a method of rational

and ſcriptural education, which is calculated to lead to true faith and right conduct in human life, ſhall agree in ſubſtituting a very different one in its room, whereby men are led into falſe notions both of the faith and practice of true Chriſtianity, unhappy muſt be the caſe of ſuch as come under their care; they muſt neceſſarily come into life under great diſadvantages, which their parents and paſtors will be moſt chargeable with the guilt of, tho themſelves muſt in conſequence be conſiderable ſufferers. But why muſt all theſe deplorable evils be repreſented as owing to the inſufficiency of reaſon, when they are evidently owing to mens laying it aſide? Why muſt it be reckoned unequal to the taſk of acquainting us with the principles, or bringing us to the practice of a virtuous life; when it has not been ſuffered to try its ſtrength, but hindered from ſhowing what it is able to do in it? as, where religion is preſcribed by human authority, and received on that ground, is really the caſe. For if there had ſubſiſted a chriſtian miniſtry throughout all the ages of the chriſtian church, upon the plan of the Scriptures, wherein the office of its miniſters is a laborious work, and all their honour is from a due diſcharge of it; it is highly probable, that by their pious pains, in conjunction with the care of truly chriſtian parents, which reaſon certainly would have helped them to take, ſuch children, as injoyed them, might have come to the exerciſe *of rational faith time enough for regulating the conduct of their life:* and therefore the want of ſuch a timely faith cannot fairly be charged upon the inſufficiency of reaſon, but is owing to ſomewhat elſe.

Tho, where men have been ſo unhappy as to want the advantage of this early inſtruction, they will be likely to grow up with very vitious paſſions, and ill habits of mind; it does not follow, that they

they will therefore be "[a] beyond the power of pre-"cept to retrieve;" and that "[b] not having the "benefit of theſe inſtructions at firſt, it will "be to very little purpoſe to have them at all." The Goſpel was at firſt propoſed chiefly to perſons in this circumſtance, who were as deeply immerſed in ignorance and ill habits, as perhaps any age can furniſh us with an inſtance of; yet ſo far from being paſt a poſſibility of recovery, they *converted* and reformed in great numbers at the preaching of it: and from thence it appears, that tho the conqueſt of deep rooted prejudice and vice may be exceeding difficult, we are not however abſolutely to deſpair of obtaining it. They were indeed *involved in the moſt horrible degrees of guilt*, and tho they *had not the benefit of theſe inſtructions at firſt*, it was not *to little*, but to very *great* and *good purpoſe*, that they injoyed them afterwards; their *converting from darkneſs to light, from idols to God, and from vice to virtue*, was a wonderful effect of their late information, and this was an effect, if the Scripture is to be credited, of argument and conviction. And the fact ſhows, that coming to faith did not require the time, nor proceed by ſuch ſlow degrees, nor was the reſult, tho of rational examination and inquiry, of ſuch long and tedious ſcepticiſm and ſuſpence, as is ſuppoſed to be neceſſary in the caſe. And when or wherever the Goſpel is preached, in the purity of its doctrine, and ſtrength of its evidence, and with becoming integrity, piety, and zeal, it may juſtly be expected to have in ſome meaſure the like effect for ever: for they are the corruptions mingled with it, the falſe principles upon which it is recommended, and the crying ambition, avarice, cruelty, and every contrariety to it in the character of its preachers, which render

[a] p. 14. [b] p. 15.

render an examination into it more intricate and difficult now, than it was at firſt; and are the great and ſtanding obſtacles to mens coming, or being diſpoſed to come, to the faith of it.

" [a] But were it poſſible ſtill, that our doubting " diſciple ſhould not be in the mean time at this " ſuppoſed loſs for his duty on any occaſion, let " his natural obligations, as he may pretend, be " never ſo obvious and ſelfevident, and his prac- " tice never ſo ſtrictly conformable; what, if with- " out this previous acquiſition, and devout tem- " per I contend for, the beſt of lives is no cir- " cumſtance to recommend or qualify us for any " regard from the throne of grace? Good works " done before faith, and without the eſpecial in- " fluence of this ſanctifying principle, are ſo far " from being accepted in themſelves, as the terms " of a compleat obedience; that they do not ſo " much as put men into a nearer ſtate for favour, " or a capacity of being the ſooner inlightned: " they do not, as our church expreſſes it, make " men meet to receive grace." The practice of morality, without any regard had to the example, authority, or acceptance of God, cannot, I ſuppoſe, be ſo well eſteemed of, or accepted by him, as when it is obſerved under the influence of theſe motives: it cannot be practiſed as the ſervice of God, nor can men thus *come to him*, without *believing that he is* [b]; and therefore the practice of it is placed to the account of this principle by the ſacred writer. And that reaſon is ſufficient to make the diſcovery of his being and perfections, and the duty of *lifting up holy hands without doubting* [c], as St. Paul directs, is evident from its being required of them, when they had nothing but reaſon to help them to do it with. And tho the virtue practiſed from this principle of faith in God might

[a] p. 15, 16. [b] Heb. xi. 6. [c] 1 Tim. ii. 8.

might not be of ſuch perfection, as to be accepted in itſelf, as a compleat obedience; it could not however fail of being in ſome meaſure pleaſing to God. If by faith he means the faith of Chriſt, and by *plain morality*, ſuch a practice of it, as we are led to from a regard to the example, authority, and acceptance of Almighty God, where the faith of Chriſt is not and cannot be had; it is ſo far from being true, or the doctrine of the Scripture, that ſuch *good works do not put men into a nearer ſtate for favour, and capacity of being the ſooner inlightned*, that the contrary is moſt evident even from the Scripture itſelf. For why elſe did Chriſt give command to his apoſtles to inquire out *the worthy, the choice* among men, as the moſt likely to receive the doctrine he ſent them to preach? Why elſe did he declare, that they, who had *learned of the Father*, would thereby be induced, as they were thereby prepared, *to learn of him?* And what account can be given of the meſſage, which the Angel was ſent with to Cornelius: *Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God*[a]*?* or of God's ſhowing Peter, that *in every nation he that feareth God, and worketh righteouſneſs, is accepted with him*[b]*?* Our author indeed has an expreſſion of *his church*, which may be of ſome ſervice with thoſe, who will be concluded by ſuch kind of authority: but what matters it how his church, or any other ſuch church has expreſſed this, or any other matter whatever? Could the deciſions of ever ſo many churches, and ever ſo well conſtituted, be produced to the contrary; *what is there, that the nature of any ſuch human aſſurances can poſſibly afford us, that has not more than a balance* in ſuch an authority as that of God? The authority our author quotes is of a piece with his aſſertion, falſhood and abſurdity are upheld by ſuch

[a] Acts x. 4. [b] ver. 35.

ſuch authority; but the doctrine of Chriſt, as it is of a different nature, ſtands upon a very different ground.

" [a] The exacteſt obſerver of moral laws is a vile " and wretched ſiner in God's account, as long as " he proceeds by human lights and motives, and " upon the ſtrength of mere ethicks only. Nay " even his moſt virtuous actions themſelves are " highly criminal and diſpleaſing to God, as long " as he continues in ſuch a diſpoſition of mind, " as they are undoubtedly of a nature corrupted " and unregenerate. *For whatever is not of faith,* " *is ſin.*" If our author means, that thoſe *virtuous actions* are *highly criminal and diſpleaſing to God*, which proceed from a full and firm conviction of his being and perfections, ſuch as reaſon, when it is duly exerciſed on the natural and obvious proofs and evidences of them, is given and therefore able to lead us to; and that *the exacteſt obſerver of moral laws*, who obſerves them on that principle, *is a vile and wretched ſiner in God's account*; ſufficient argument has, I think, already been produced to ſhew, that this is not true, nor agreeable to the Scripture. And the aſſertion of the apoſtle, that *whatever is not of faith, is ſin*, has no manner of relation at all to this caſe; ſince what he aſſerts is, that whatever action a man ventures to perform, whilſt he has the faith or perſuaſion of its being unlawful, or is in great doubt, whether it be lawful or not, has the nature of ſin; but in this caſe the actions performed are done from full faith and perſuaſion of their obligation, and that perſuaſion founded on proper principles. But if by *human lights and motives* he means the directions of mere human authority, and injunctions of civil or church laws; and by the exacteſt obſerver of

[a] p. 16.

moral laws, one who builds his obſervation on this ground only, wholly independent of all rational grounds and principles of obſerving them: it may poſſibly be allowed, that *ſuch actions* may be in that light *criminal and diſpleaſing to God*; and *ſuch perſons vile and wretched ſinners in his account*, without any danger of hurting the cauſe of rational faith by it.

It is further ſaid: "We muſt, if reaſon be "the alloted guide, be obliged to wait at leaſt till "that reaſon can bring us her report; mean time "in this infidel interim ſhould death ſurprize us, "what ſhall now become of our hopes, without "this neceſſary preparative for our introduction? "You will examine, you ſay: *Thou fool! this "night ſhall thy ſoul be required of thee.*" Such a knowledge and perſuaſion of moral truth, as lays a foundation for a virtuous life, is a work of time, and grows up gradually in the mind, under proper culture and care. When parents inſtil and children imbibe it in their tender years, it will not be long, ere they may come to an acquaintance with thoſe moral principles, which will give them a juſt idea both of the preſent and future life; and ſhew them the real and neceſſary connexion between their character now, and their condition hereafter. And why ſhould not that, which ought to be the firſt concern thro our life, be the leſſon firſt taught us in our education, and introduction to it? Moral principles and virtuous habits have as near a connexion with our rational powers, as folly and vice have with our carnal paſſions; and if inſtead of letting our mind lie waſte for the paſſions to get head, and overgrow our reaſon, it was cultivated like a garden, wherein the choiceſt fruits are planted, and every thing noxious or uſeleſs in it caſt out; uſeful knowledge and ſolid virtue might come to take place, in conſequence of that method of ignorance

norance and vice, which are owing to the oppo-
site one. Where such an education was improved into a proportionable piety and virtue, why might not such a virtuous character and conduct be matter of gracious acceptance with God, without the faith or knowledge of the Gospel, where it was not to be had, and where it was not so much wanted as in many other cases? Or if it should be preached to such virtuous persons, could it require a life time for them to give their verdict upon the case? Would reason so improved be long at a loss to make its report? Or supposing such a man, a Nathaniel, or a Cornelius, should in the interim be cut off, before his inquiry, in which he made no unnecessary delay, was brought to a conclusion, and he could reap the fruit of a confirmed faith from it; what room is there to think, that he would *miss of his hope*, that he would be *unfurnished with his passport*, that he would be *without a weding garment*; or what reason to fear it should be said to him, *Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee?* It may be a sufficient answer to all such suppositions, that they are full of absurdity, and applications of the Scripture as contrary to its sense, as injurious to its honour. The fool, our Saviour speaks of, was a man, who looked upon this life as his all, and upon sensual injoyment as all his concern in it, and thought himself certain of the greatest uncertainty; and what relation has that case to this? Where is the justice of applying what is said in relation to the one, to the other, that is in all things quite the reverse of it? The weding garment is not meant of any thing out of mens power to procure. How can the want of it be ascribed to men, who have acquired all that was in their power? It is not mere faith, much less an irrational one, that is a *safe passport* to go out of the world with; but, if that word may be

allowed, a virtuous character in proportion to the means men have had for acquiring it, and the time which they have been allowed for perfecting it. Reaſon therefore muſt pronounce ſafety in their caſe; and there is nothing in the Scripture to prove, that God will ever reverſe its ſentence. Where early education has been formed upon the plan of the chriſtian religion in conjunction with the principles of reaſon, and where it has been followed with ſuitable ſucceſs in proportion to the time; all danger and doubt of a man's rejection by God, let him die when God pleaſes, is happily ſuperſeded. And if a man is cut off in an infidel interim, who had waſted his life in vice and folly, and a total inattention to what ought to have been the buſineſs of it, and begins not to think of it, till death is at the door, and his time is expiring; whatever be the bad conſequence, it is the effect not of rational but irrational conduct, and may be laid to his neglect of the exerciſe of reaſon; but is upon no account chargeable to the inſufficiency of the principle.

But this author aſks: "And is it now any unwarrantable concluſion, from all theſe conſiderations, to infer, that religion therefore *can never be a thing to be taught*; that it muſt needs be ſomething, that *does not require time to attain*, like other common leſſons and ſciences, which are indifferent in their conſequences?" The conſiderations refered to are of a nature to admit the infering this and numberleſs other abſurdities from them; and was there no other argument of their falſhood, than their leading to ſuch an abſurdity, this might be ſufficient to evince it. It may be no unwarrantable concluſion from theſe conſiderations; but if they are themſelves infirm and fallacious, what value can they ſtamp upon a concluſion the moſt warrantably infered from them?

Is it any recommendation, or argument in favour of any poſition, that it indubitably follows from falſe premiſes? or are falſhood and abſurdity ſufficient to ſupport, what is contrary to fact and univerſal experience? The falſhood of this aſſertion might be eaſily made appear from many conſiderations, which ſtand on much firmer ground, than thoſe its truth is infered from: but as arguments drawn from the authority of our Saviour, and the holy Scriptures, muſt have peculiar force with every believer, I would aſk; how it is to be reconciled with his office and practice, in teaching his religion during the courſe of his miniſtry, to the Jewiſh nation, and his directions to the apoſtles at his laſt parting with them to go and teach it to all others. *All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghoſt; teaching them to obſerve all things whatſoever I have commanded you* [a]. And if *religion can never be a thing to be taught*, how came our Saviour to beſtow ſo much pains upon his apoſtles, as well as the people? If it *does not require time to attain*, how came the apoſtles to be ſo ſlow in their proficiency, and ſo long in arriving at the complete meaſure of the knowledge, faith, and practice of the chriſtian religion, even when ſuch a maſter as Chriſt himſelf taught it them? Whence proceeded their ignorance of many parts of Chriſtianity for ſo long a time, but that it *required time to attain* them? Why did our Saviour expoſtulate with them, as *fooliſh and ſlow of heart to believe?* And why did ſuch defects of right apprehenſion, temper, and conduct, remain in them ſo long? Muſt not theſe things appear abſurd, if our author's poſition is admited; and as there is ſuch a repugnancy between them, that ſuch a charge muſt lie

[a] Matt. xxviii. 19, 20.

lie either againſt them or this, can a true believer be long in doubt, where to fix it?

It is mentioned however, as a proof of this aſſertion, that "the very ſame reaſons, that make "faith neceſſary at all, make it equally ſo every "moment of our lives." But mens obligation to faith depends upon their capacity; and as that may vary at one time from what it may be at another, their faith may exiſt in greater firmneſs and perfection at one time than another: and to ſay, that the ſame degree of faith, which is obligatory upon them, when their capacity is at the higheſt, was obligatory at all other times, when comparatively their capacity was ſmall, or when they were in no capacity at all for it, is an aſſertion, that may paſs with irrational believers, or with ſuch as can believe any thing; but it will no more appear to be true, than they will appear wiſe, and virtuous, and acceptable to God by their ſo doing.

This author proceeds in the next place to ſhew the unlikelihood, if not the impoſſibility, of acquiring a rational faith, from the great difficulty of the acquiſition compared with the inſufficient capacity of the generality of mankind for making it. But whether he has not greatly miſrepreſented them both, by ſtraining the difficulty of the laſt beyond the truth, whilſt he has reduced almoſt to nothing their capacity for performing it, muſt be ſubmitted to the reader.

"[a] The nature of the evidence of religion in "your rational way being founded intirely on the "credit and authenticneſs of hiſtory, a very criti-"cal point to pronounce upon, it is impoſſible, "without a good natural turn for reaſoning, and "even ſome very conſiderable acquiſitions of learn-"ing ſuperadded, to give any rational deciſion at "all in the caſe." That the nature of the evidence

[a] p. 18.

dence of Chriſtianity, in the rational way, is founded intirely on the credit of hiſtory in all caſes, is plainly not true: for was there not evidence of it in the rational way, when it was preached originally by Chriſt, and his apoſtles? Believers were then acquainted with the facts of the Goſpel not by the report of hiſtory, the evidence of them depended not upon its credit, nor the faith of them upon its teſtimony; but they were eye and ear witneſſes of them themſelves, and the authenticneſs of their hiſtory was no point of examination with them. The faith of Chriſt in the firſt age of Chriſtianity was in part founded upon the evidence ariſing from the nature of the doctrine itſelf, which ſufficiently approved itſelf to thoſe, *who had learned of the Father*, to be worthy of coming from him, and carried in it many inducements to believe, that it actually did ſo. The juſt light, in which it repreſented God, and virtue, and human nature; its ſuitableneſs to the depraved condition of mankind; its tendency to rectify the moral ſtate of the world; its ſuperiority to whatever was to be met with under the name of religion elſewhere, and whatever men had been able to teach or learn of one another upon that head; its being of univerſal and everlaſting uſe, and teaching the juſt idea and aſſurance of immortality, as well as the qualifications to render it a bleſſed one: were ſurely all together ſome inducement to believe it the effect of a higher than any human cauſe. And as their faith of it was in part an effect of this internal, it was in part alſo owing to that external evidence, which was afforded for compleating it, and conſiſted in the viſible and extraordinary interpoſition of God in the caſe, and the exerciſe of his power for the atteſtation of this particular truth of Chriſt's miſſion. For that this was not deſigned for their conviction of the reaſonableneſs or excellency of the doctrine,

doctrine, is manifeſt from its not having efficacy to procure it; that is diſcoverable in the exerciſe of our own reaſon, and not by any act of power, tho of ever ſo extraordinary a nature whatever.

As true Chriſtianity, which is what is contained in the Scripture, is *always the ſame*[a], its internal evidence is, to ſuch as take it from thence, always the ſame likewiſe; and it will ſcarce fail to approve itſelf to equitable judges in all times, as it did at firſt, the juſt ſtandard of their moral practice. Our duty is laid down in it in that perſpicuity, purity, and perfection, that a rational man, whether abſolute and full evidence of its actually coming from God was to be had, or not, would as ſuch chuſe to act by it, in preference to all others; and in proportion as he did ſo, would find his account in it. And when the truth of the facts come under conſideration, in order to know, whether the external evidence, as well as the internal, extends to us, and is able to produce in us a full perſuaſion of its divine original; it will not, I imagine, be found to be ſtrictly agreeable to truth, that even our conviction of the facts is founded intirely upon the credit of hiſtory, much leſs upon that of common hiſtory, and much leſs ſtill, that the nature of the whole evidence is intirely founded upon it.

If it did indeed reſt even upon ſuch hiſtory, as in all other caſes is allowed credible, and is univerſally credited; would it not be as warrantable a ground of conviction and action in this caſe as in others? or why muſt the evidence of human teſtimony be annulled in this caſe, which is ſo fully credited, and ſo firmly relied on by men in all others? But are there not many circumſtances in this caſe, which raiſe the hiſtory of theſe facts above

[a] Heb. xiii. 8.

bove the level of common hiſtory, and render the faith, that is founded on it, more firm, than what is founded upon that? For beſides that they are reported and confirmed by the conſtant and concurrent teſtimony of friends, and enemies, and indifferent perſons, and were never doubted or called in queſtion by any; do we not, in comparing the times ſubſequent to the firſt publication of the Goſpel, even down to our own, with thoſe prophetic portions of the ſacred Scripture, wherein they are refered to, and deſcribed, find, that God may in ſome meaſure be ſaid to be giving continual teſtimony to the truth of it, particularly in the ſpread and continuance of this religion, in the deſolate and diſperſed condition of the Jewiſh people, and the exorbitant increaſe of the antichriſtian power in the chriſtian church? Does not our Saviour give ſome countenance to the competency of this ground, in the words he puts into the mouth of Abraham, whom we can ſcarcely ſuppoſe, he would make to ſpeak abſurdly, and who is repreſented by him as ſpeaking of the caſe of the rich man's brethren: *They have Moſes and the prophets, let them hear them* [a]? And does he not juſtify the Jewiſh people, as acting on ſufficient ground, when they believed the truth of the Old Teſtament facts, and credited the authority of the Old Teſtament writings? And had they a much eaſier way of coming at rational ſatisfaction about thoſe facts and writings of the Old Teſtament, than we have concerning thoſe of the New? And I do not ſee, why ſuch a faith, as is founded on this internal and external evidence of the chriſtian religion, may not paſs for rational, well grounded, and acceptable to God, in proportion to the ho-

[a] Luke xvi. 29.

neſty with which men ſeek after it, and the ſubſequent virtue to which they improve it.

This author allows, that "[a] the authenticneſs of "facts, and the force of external proofs, are ſuffi-"cient to evince beyond all contradiction the ve-"racity of the ſacred writings and miſſion, as an "undoubted and unexceptionable claim to univer-"ſal diſcipleſhip:" and juſtly obſerves, that "it "is one thing, whether a propoſition be indeed "true in itſelf; and another, whether a man be "bound to apprehend and believe it." But when he repreſents the reaſoners as ſaying, "[b] this is "true, and therefore all men muſt believe it;" he lays a charge againſt them, which he will not be able to make proof of. For "[c] the connexion "and juſtice of the inference, that, becauſe it is "true, therefore all are bound to believe it," is a circumſtance, which they, as well as he, do moſt juſtly except againſt. That Chriſtianity is true, and therefore fit to be believed, is granted; but that thoſe, who never heard of it, are obliged to believe it, is moſt abſurd and falſe. That thoſe, who never had opportunity of acquaintance with it, or who have no capacity of apprehending and believing it, are yet obliged to believe it, is what neither the Scripture aſſerts, nor the reaſoners, who build on the Scripture, have any diſpoſition to aſſert. There are numberleſs truths, which have never been revealed by God to the world: their truth of itſelf is no ground of obligation on us to believe them; if ſo, our faith muſt extend very wide indeed, and we ſhould be under obligation to believe whatever is true. There muſt be a power and capacity in the mind to conſtitute obligation to believe any truth whatever; and ſo far as the truth of Chriſtianity is diſcoverable by us in the juſt exerciſe of the powers we are poſſeſſed of,

[a] p. 18. [b] p. 20. [c] ibid.

of, the obligation to believe extends, and no further.

But it is aſked: " [a] How few are there, that na-" ture has indowed with theſe proper talents? and " how much fewer, whom their education has a-" dapted for any ſuch taſk?" Would it not be a fairer queſtion, to aſk, how few would be incapable of this, if the parental and paſtoral care was duly exerciſed according to the ſhare, which each ought to take in, and the power which each has over the early education and inſtruction of children? The capacities and talents of men are very various; ſome have but ſmall and few in compariſon with thoſe of others, and thoſe of moſt are greatly depreſſed by the neglect of their education, and by the artifice and impoſture of thoſe, who make uſe of their ſuperior capacities to keep mankind in ignorance and ſlavery, preſcribe limits to their knowledge, cramp their inquiries after it, and indeavour to impoſe on them ſuch opinions and tenets, as favour the vices, and flatter the paſſions both of thoſe, who are impoſed on, and of thoſe who impoſe on them.

The repreſentation, which this author has given us of mankind, is ſuch, as, if it was true, would be a ſufficient bar againſt their believing almoſt any thing; ſince they cannot be under obligation to any thing, that they are under a natural incapacity of. And if mens obligation is to be judged of by their capacity, and that by the repreſentation that is here given of it; it muſt be very little indeed, that they can be required to believe. " [b] For " the generality of apprehenſions, he ſays, extend " not beyond a ſimple propoſition, and are thrown " out at once at the very mention of introducing " a medium." But this is moſt evidently con-

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[a] p. 18. [b] p. 17.

trary to fact and experience. The generality of mankind appear to be poſſeſſed of much larger capacities, and more extenſive powers by far, than he allows them; and are generally maſters of an exquiſite ſagacity in every temporal and civil concern, to which they are trained, and to which they apply themſelves. *The children of this world are wiſe in their generation* [a]. And nothing could incapacitate them for the like wiſdom in the concerns of virtue and true religion, if the current of their wills and affections ran as ſtrong after moral and eternal, as it does after ſenſual and temporal objects. Their deficiency herein is a deficiency of will, not of power; of inclination, and not of ability. Our Saviour ſeems to have ſet them before his diſciples as an example of activity, and his words carry a kind of reproof in them, that they did not emulate and outſtrip them in it, in proportion to the ſuperior excellence and dignity of what they had in view.

When St. Paul argues, that *the inviſible things of God from the creation of the world are clearly ſeen, being underſtood by the things that are made* [b]: were few men qualified for ſeeing them, which are ſo clearly ſeen? Is this an argument out of the reach of *the generality of apprehenſions*, and muſt they neceſſarily *be thrown out at the mention of this medium*; and yet *be without excuſe* for not being convinced by it? When he *preached unto* the idolaters *to turn from their idols to the living God*, from the conſideration of *their being vanities*, and from that of *his having made heaven, and earth, and the ſea, and all things which are therein* [c]: why did he *introduce the mention of any medium*, when their *apprehenſions*, which were probably none of the quickeſt, were not capable of taking it in, and they were likely to be bewildered, and overſet with the men-

[a] Luke xvi. 8. [b] Rom. i. 20. [c] Acts xiv. 15.

mention of any? When he ſhews them, that *God had not left himſelf without a witneſs, in that he did good, and gave rain from heaven, and fruitful ſeaſons* [a]: how came he to repreſent God, as expecting they ſhould ever be led by thoſe means to the acknowledgment of him, as the author of them; when their *apprehenſions* were not capable of going *beyond a ſimple propoſition*, and *reaſon from its own nature, as well as that of religion, could not poſſibly be intended by him to lead men to true faith?* And when he aſſerts, that God had given men an argument, whereby *they might all be aſſured, that he would judge the world in righteouſneſs by that man, whom he hath ordained, in that he hath raiſed him from the dead* [b]: how could this be an argument calculated for *all men*, when the generality of men are incapable of perceiving the force of any? or how could this medium ever lead them to the belief of God's future judging of the world by Chriſt; when the very mention of a medium throws moſt men into confuſion, and muſt neceſſarily be loſt upon them?

If this author's eſtimate of the human mind is juſt, the whole account of Scripture is a miſrepreſentation of it; and the conduct of providence towards men has been founded on a miſtake: ſeeing the Scripture ſpeaks of God's perfections, as what *might have been known, as being manifeſt to men*, and known, and believed, by the means of his works, and in a way of rational deduction from them; and pronounces them inexcuſable in not having attained this knowledge and faith by theſe means. It ſuited well enough the point of this author to reduce the power of reaſon to this low ebb; ſince if the generality had no more reaſon, than he repreſents, and that capable of doing no more, than he confines it to, it might well have followed, that they

[a] Acts xiv. 17. [b] ch. xvii. 31.

they could never come to faith, nor to any thing elſe, that is wiſe or worthy, by it. But it is another queſtion, whether this account be agreeable to truth, or not. And that God appears to have required from men in the uſe of reaſon more than that degree of it, which this author allows them is adequate or proportioned to, is a much better argument to prove, that they have more, and are able to do more with it, than he is willing to admit, than any he has produced in behalf of the contrary. And was the ſame pains taken in the education and inſtruction of children, to teach them the rudiments of moral knowledge and virtuous conduct, as is beſtowed in inculcating on them trifles and errors, and *teaching* them *for doctrines the commandments of men*; mankind might grow up in wiſdom and virtue, as they grow up in years, and come into life with a competent ability of judging, what is fit for them to believe, and to do in it, and what they have to expect, when it comes to a concluſion. That ſuch a ſuppoſition is no airy ſpeculation, or *Utopian* dream, is manifeſt, in that it is no more, than what God appears both in reaſon and Scripture to have required of men; and it is too ſad a truth, that a great part of mankind periſhes for lack of a due compliance with it.

Where is the pertinency or juſtice of ſuppoſing (ſo as to include any abſurdity in it) on the rational ſcheme, that "[a] a diſputable ſubject is left to "mankind to exerciſe their judgment upon, and "at the ſame time all are required on the peril of "their ſouls to be in the right?" For if by *a diſputable ſubject* is meant only a ſubject, about which men do diſpute, the very being of a God, about which it has been ſhewn, men are required at their peril to be in the right, comes under that denomination,

[a] p. 17.

nation, as well as the truth of Chriſtianity; and there can be no more abſurdity in ſuppoſing, they are required to believe the one, than the other. If by *a diſputable ſubject* is meant a ſubject, about which men do diſpute, but have no ſufficient means, whereby they can ſatisfy themſelves, on which ſide the truth lies; this has been ſhewn to be falſe, and unjuſtly repreſented as the caſe of Chriſtianity. And if by *a diſputable ſubject* is meant a ſubject, which tho men do diſpute about, they may yet in the exerciſe of their rational powers come to full ſatisfaction, on which ſide the truth does lie; there can in ſuch caſe be no manner of injuſtice in requiring them *to be in the right:* ſince no more is required, than to exerciſe their powers for the purpoſe they were given them, and to come to the ſatisfaction they have it in their power to come to. And when he adds: "[a] What "an injurious repreſentation, what an arbitrary "image is this of our wiſe and good Creator! "requiring a juſt judgment of things, and not "giving abilities to judge at all?" whether is there not more room for charging this on the ſcheme, which our author eſpouſes, than upon that of the reaſoners? For has not God required of us in the exerciſe of our reaſon more, than this author will allow it able to perform? Has he not expected, and required at our hands, a belief of his being in the very method of rational deduction from his works; and has not this author pronounced it beyond the power of the generality to comply with it? *A ſimple propoſition* is all within the reach of their *apprehenſions*, while much more is required of them. Methinks he ſhould therefore rather give up his eſtimate of the power of reaſon, than by inſiſting on it expoſe himſelf to the hazard of becoming *ſelf condemned*, and aſſerting of *our wiſe*

[a] p. 18.

and good creator, that he is a hard maſter, who reaps where he has not ſowed, and gathers where he has not ſtrewed [a]; the doing which we ſhould all of us not only ſpeak, but think of, with *the juſteſt horror and deteſtation.*

This author proceeds to obſerve: "[b] For the "ſame reaſon, all the ingenious applications "of myſterious prophecies, and their references, "are in my opinion never to be mentioned, as "arguments and means of conviction, in behalf "of a truth deſtined to be univerſally received. "The learned and profound calculation of Da-"niel's weeks, if religious faith were a matter of "mere ſpeculation, would go near to tempt me "perhaps into a favourable opinion of the criti-"ciſm and juſtneſs of the conjecture." *Applications of prophecies and their references*, having the marks of truth, may fairly enough be *mentioned as arguments and means of conviction, in behalf of a truth deſtined to be univerſally received*, and may be ſet in the cleareſt and juſteſt light, that they may afford help for the diſcovery of truth, to ſuch who are capable of apprehending and being convinced by their force; they who have no capacity of apprehending it, cannot indeed be obliged to be convinced by it; but that is no reaſon againſt, and ſhould be no hinderance to the propoſing them to ſuch, who have. Suppoſing that there are many, who may not have ability to conceive the force of the argument from *Daniel's weeks*; yet the argument in general, as taken from the prophecies in favour of our Saviour's miſſion from God, is not ſurely upon the whole, and in every other branch ſo intricate, as it is in this: nor is the evidence of the Goſpel of ſo intricate a nature, as that this is fit to paſs for a proper ſpecimen of it; or ſo ſcanty, as that this ſhould be reckoned abſolutely eſ-

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[a] Matt. xxv. 24. [b] p. 20.

ſential to the faith of it. The chriſtian religion is ſufficiently ſafe from all danger of detection, in the truth of the argument in itſelf, as it is in that of all others, upon which the faith of it was originally and authentically founded; and to ſuch, who are competent judges in this caſe, it appears ſo the more from the unſucceſsfulneſs of the moſt willing and indefatigable pains, which the enemies of Chriſtianity have been at to overthrow it: and the faith of thoſe Chriſtians, who are not able to enter into the detail of ſuch critical and abſtruſe reaſonings, is ſufficiently warranted by the internal evidence of the chriſtian religion, and ſo much of the external, as the capacities of the generality, when cultivated by others, and improved by themſelves, in the manner they ought to be, may be able to comprehend. And the like, I ſuppoſe, it is not in the power of any man to produce in behalf of any other religion whatever. It is the duty of Chriſtians not only to improve themſelves in their knowledge of the chriſtian doctrine, but to enlarge their acquaintance, as far as they are able, with the evidence of its truth; that their faith may grow up to its compleat meaſure, and their virtue and ſalvation be rendered more ſecure. And were not the generality wanting to themſelves, were they as deſirous and ſtudious of theſe things, as they are of thoſe, which are of infinitely leſs moment; would the parents of families, and paſtors of churches, give a helping hand according to their reſpective power and duty; and would others be more cautious of laying offences in their way: it would be no great preſumption to expect, that acquaintance with the doctrine and evidence, with the faith and practice, and with the power as well as the form of religion, might be much more perfect and general, than it is at preſent. And whenever ſenſible and ſincere perſons bend

their mind this way, it will in my opinion be found by them no impracticable taſk, nor the performance of it to interfere with any other imployments, which it can be neceſſary or wiſe for them to engage in thro their life.

If the moſt ingenious and inquiſitive perſons are able to diſcover in a careful conſideration, and in a conjunct view of the divine and human nature, and the methods of the government God exerciſes over the world, ſuch further evidences of the truth of religion, as tend to confirm its divine original, and corroborate the faith of it; this will in no wiſe reflect on the juſtneſs or force of what they were originally built on: but will be a further ſatisfaction to the minds of believers, to find that, as all truth is conſiſtent, the trial of their religion by any truth whatever turns out to its advantage, and tends to the confuſion of nothing but infidelity. Tho why *theſe inlightning lucubrations*, as they are called, "[a] ſhould be actu-
"ally inſiſted on as proofs, whoſe force we are
"bound to admit, as calculated for the general
"and ready uſe of all thoſe, to whom the pre-
"cept of belief is addreſſed;" I am not able to ſee, any more than I ſhall ſay what cauſe this author has to complain, that it is required.

But this author ſeems to be of opinion, that the faith of Chriſtianity has no manner of reſpect to any rational evidence at all. His words are, and they are very remarkable: "[b] In fact it is noto-
"rious, that the moſt, and I might add the beſt,
"of every religious profeſſion, do never concern
"themſelves the leaſt in any argumentative taſks,
"or would indeed be ever the better for it, if they
"did." How far the moſt of any religious profeſſion, eſpecially of ſuch as are falſe, are alienated from reaſon, I am not concerned at preſent to inquire;

[a] p. 21. [b] p. 22.

quire; or how far this is true in reſpect to the Chriſtian, is of little weight in this queſtion: ſince whatever be the caſe in fact, it does by no means prove, that it ought not to be otherwiſe. The fact is perhaps too true and evident to be denied, and the cauſes too firmly rooted for us to hope, however earneſtly we might deſire, their removal. And if this author will have it, that they are *the beſt* too, even of the beſt religious profeſſion, who *never concern themſelves the leaſt in any argumentative taſks, nor would be ever the better for it, if they did*; and he is not to be convinced by reaſon of the miſtake, I know no other help for it, but muſt take leave to obſerve, that it is taking for granted the very thing, which is to be proved; and merely aſſerting, where argument was much wanted, and where, if it had been to be had, one would think it ſhould have been uſed. For that they, who are Chriſtians without any reaſon for their being ſuch, are better Chriſtians, than thoſe, who are ſuch upon the reaſons, which are afforded them by God for becoming ſuch; that we ſhould be never the better for being converſant with thoſe arguments, which God has required us to be converſant with, and offered us as the means of our faith, and holineſs, and eternal ſalvation: are things, which require ſomewhat more than aſſertion to deſerve any credit with us; and if we withhold it, till more is produced, we may juſtly be excuſed, and poſſibly for ever too. There are indeed a *few*, who, he allows, lay claim to *a rational conviction*; but they only *pretend to it, flatter themſelves* therein, were *equally convinced before the trial*, and *intended to be convinced at ſetting out* in it, and *might recollect, if they would fairly own the truth*, that they were ſo[a]. But is it not very ſtrange, that *the veracity of the ſacred writings and*

[a] p. 22.

miſſion ſhould be *capable of being evinced, beyond all contradiction, as an undoubted and unexceptionable claim to univerſal diſciplesſhip* [a]; and yet, that there ſhould not be one diſciple in the world, who has perceived this, and *aſſented* on the perception? ſince but *few* pretend to it, and they *only* pretend to it, *flatter themſelves* in ſo doing, have no more *conviction, than they had before the trial*, no other, than what is the effect of an *intention* formed previous to the making of it.

" [b] For granting yet further every man living to " be naturally as capable as you pleaſe of judging " in theſe points, that in conſequence of ſuch ca- " pacity his reaſon, duly excited, muſt needs lead " him to embrace Chriſtianity in preference to all " the other religious profeſſions in the world, and " to diſtinguiſh ſtill farther our eſtabliſhed church " in particular as the mode the moſt confor- " mable to the divine plan: I aſk ſtill, where is " the man living in the ſituation requiſite for the " execution of ſuch an attempt, and qualified " even upon this ſuppoſition to make the trial?" Where God has afforded men ſufficient evidence of the chriſtian religion, and ability for entering into the examination of others, and comparing them together; there can be little fear, but that in the due uſe of them they will embrace the former in preference to the reſt: and where men injoy an ample acquaintance with the grounds of chriſtian faith, without opportunity of looking very narrowly into all other religions, it is not, I think, to be doubted, but that a faith of it as ſo founded may be effectual to the purpoſes of virtuous conduct, and of eternal ſalvation. I am far indeed from ſuppoſing, that every man living is capable of entering into ſuch a curious and minute examination of all the other religions in the world, and

[a] p. 18. [b] p. 22, 23.

and the compariſon of them with the chriſtian, as is requiſite to the forming an exact judgment of their intrinſic value and comparative worth; but it is in my opinion too raſh to aſſert, that no man living can be in the ſituation for the forming a competent judgment in theſe points. It ſeems rather on the contrary, as if many perſons, both among the Jews and gentiles, when their ſeveral profeſſions flouriſhed in the world, and the Goſpel was publiſhed as a univerſal religion, which was to remove them, and come in their room, were actually in a capacity to enter into ſuch an inquiry, to make ſuch a compariſon, and to form ſuch a judgment, at leaſt with reſpect to the chriſtian, and that particular religion which they renounced to embrace it: and the *devout Gentiles* ſtill more extenſively. When our Saviour perſuaded the Jewiſh people to *take his yoke* upon them, and when St. Paul preached to the idolatrous Gentiles *to turn from their idols*, which were mere *vanities*, to the *living God, who made heaven and earth*; was not this puting them upon ſuch a procedure, and to be complied with in virtue of it? The Jews exchanging the grievous yoke of legal ceremonies for the light and eaſy one of Chriſt's moral precepts, and the Gentiles leaving the abſurd ſervice of their vain idols for the reaſonable worſhip of the living God, was a taſk to be performed in conſequence of their natural capacity, aſſiſted by the light and motives of the Goſpel. And that their reaſon ſo excited might lead them to embrace it, in preference to the profeſſion they had been ingaged in before, appears from its having been required of them by God, in the way of application to their reaſon for that purpoſe. And the capacities of men are, I ſuppoſe, equal to the difficulties of any taſk, that God now requires from them, as well as they were then.

But when it is added: "and to diſtinguiſh ſtill "farther our eſtabliſhed church in particular, as "the mode the moſt conformable to that divine "plan;" this is what I would neither deſire him *to grant*, nor grant him if he ſhould deſire it, without his firſt proving, that this is part of the taſk, which is required of us by God. This is to introduce a difficulty into the caſe far greater, than all that was in it before amounted to; and which, I ſhall readily concur with this author in ſuppoſing, that our reaſon is altogether unequal to. The arguments, which abundantly evince the truth and authority of Chriſtianity, are calculated to prove ſomething elſe of our eſtabliſhed church; but by no means the truth of its doctrines, or authority of its deciſions as ſuch. And whence theſe *ſecret whiſpers* are derived, which are more effectual for doing this, than all the power of reaſon, whether from one uniform, or from various cauſes, are inquiries, which we have no manner of occaſion to incumber ourſelves with in treating on the ſubject of Chriſtianity, or the faith of it.

"[a] Prejudice, he ſays, ever earlier than the firſt "eſſays of reaſon, is as abſolute a diſqualification "for ſuch a taſk, as the greateſt natural incapa-"city." How far men were able, without the help of Chriſtianity, to overcome their prejudices, when grown to ſuch a ſtrength, as when that appeared in the world, need not be inquired; but ſurely, when it did appear, it might be of ſome uſe to that purpoſe: and if prejudice, before that, could amount to no more than a natural incapacity, if that afforded any help for ſubduing it, it muſt be reduced to ſomething leſs. Now it is difficult to conceive, where prejudice ſhould ſubſiſt in any greater ſtrength, or where it ſhould require more force to overcome it, than as it took place both

[a] p. 23.

both among Jews and gentiles; and yet it was overcome by the influence of the Goſpel in the caſes of both, in a very remarkable manner: this fact therefore ſtands as a proof of the contrary of what this author aſſerts. And it is but a vain ſubterfuge, to deny the efficacy of reaſon, and pretend it was the effect of any other principle without its concurrence; for Chriſt and his apoſtles perſuaded the Jews and gentiles to exchange their religion for the chriſtian, upon arguments drawn from the nature of the religions ſo to be exchanged, upon arguments level to the power of reaſon, and offered in way of appeal to it, and which could not take effect, but thro its interpoſing exerciſe and conſent.

He ſays with great aſſurance, but in direct contradiction to the Scripture: "'Now it is to be "remembered all along, and carried carefully with "us, thro all theſe conſiderations, that the great "command to believe is peremptory and abſo-"lute. No conditions in the caſe, that we ſhall "believe if we have time, if we have abilities." Both time and ability are conditions as neceſſary to the obligation to faith, and the juſtice of the command, as they are to the exerciſe of faith itſelf; and, whether they are expreſſed or not, are neceſſarily ſuppoſed. The command and obligation to believe may as well be laid upon the dead, as the living, who are in abſolute and neceſſary want both of time and ability to believe. Our Saviour was ſo far from giving the command to believe, where the rational grounds, upon which the ability to believe depends, were wanting, that he forbids them even to believe on himſelf, if he did not produce them, lays down his doing it as the expreſs condition of their obligation to believe, and his not doing it as amounting to a ſufficient excuſe for

[a] p. 23.

for their not believing. *If I do not the works of my Father, believe me not. But if I do, tho ye believe not me, believe the works; that ye may know and believe, that the Father is in me, and I in him* [a].

But, "[b] to pass over all these presumptive ob- "stacles in the way, let us however suppose, that "our rational inquirer has happily laboured thro "all impediments to his wish, that he is crowned "with all imaginable success in his undertaking, "and confirmed at last beyond all remains of "doubt and scruple in his religious persuasion, "let us consider him for the present as having "attained to the highest degree of satisfaction in "the point, that reason can possibly help him to: "will a faith thus built upon syllogisms ever fur- "nish out any of those miraculous effects, which "are described to attend a just and finished be- "lief?" In the case of those miraculous effects, which our Saviour told his apostles should be wrought, if they had the particular faith they required, faith was the condition, but not the principle; they did not flow from it in a way of moral operation and consequence, as the practice of virtue did; they had no connexion with faith, as a principle adequate to the working of them, nor any other, than what was constituted by divine appointment; and had it pleased God, he might, as, if there had been the same reason for it, he undoubtedly would have made the connexion and consequence universal. But it does not appear, that those *miraculous effects* did always attend upon a *just and finished faith* in every instance of it recorded in the Scripture, or that it was made necessary by our Saviour, that they should. It was by *good works*, and not by *miraculous* ones, that *faith* was at first, and will be always *made perfect*. It might be worthy of God, to make the faith of their

[a] John x. 37. ch. xv. 24. [b] p. 24.

their being inabled to work miracles the condition of it, in thoſe, to whom the promiſe of ſuch ability was made; but it will by no means follow, that ſuch a faith can be neceſſary to the virtue or ſalvation of ſuch, to whom the promiſe was never deſigned to extend, nor the power to be granted.

" [a] Or will it even ſerve to produce any of " thoſe more known and ordinary characteriſtics, " that are given us to diſtinguiſh the true be- " liever?" As namely, " that lively and active " ſpirit of zeal: his perſiſting in the faith he has " once eſpouſed to his life's end: that compla- " cency and ſatisfaction of mind, reſulting from " the conſciouſneſs of ſuch a faith, which is the " bleſſed fruit of true and genuine faith: being " virtuous againſt his inclinations: and the ſuffer- " ing martyrdom?" If all the inſtances of conduct here mentioned are of a reaſonable nature, why ſhould not reaſon be able to conduce to them? for nothing can deſtroy the connexion between a rational principle, and its juſt effects, but what weakens the principle, or hinders the attention and regard due to it. Faith however does neither of theſe, but on the contrary ſtrengthens and improves both, by removing thoſe cauſes which before obſtructed them. Reaſon indeed alone, weakened by diſuſe, and oppreſſed by prejudice, I readily own, is without the aſſiſtance of the Goſpel unequal to the production of theſe great effects, in the manner in which they are required in the Scripture, and expected of Chriſtians. But if reaſon in its right and perfect ſtate have any efficacy to produce them, and the tendency of the Goſpel is to put it in that ſtate; theſe effects muſt be owing to a concurrence of the principles of reaſon and faith, and can no way be ſecured by ſetting

[a] p. 24.

them in oppoſition one to another. Now theſe effects are all of them of a rational nature, and it is moſt abſurd to pretend, that reaſon muſt be laid aſide in order to our performing the moſt reaſonable actions in the world. Had the effects mentioned been of an irrational nature, it might have been juſt enough to inſiſt on their being the effects of an irrational principle; but that an irrational principle ſhould be abſolutely neceſſary, and reaſon itſelf uſeleſs to the performance of the moſt rational actions, is a manifeſt contradiction. If theſe ſeveral branches therefore of chriſtian conduct are of a rational nature, and faith has any manner of tendency to promote them, the more rational faith is, the more powerful that tendency muſt be.

In regard to *that lively and active ſpirit of zeal*, if there be any thing meant by it, which comes not within the power, nor conſiſts with the nature of reaſon, as excited by the Goſpel, it is none of the genuine fruits of faith. No objection ariſes hence againſt the juſtice, nor obſtruction to the exerciſe of any inſtance of zeal, which Chriſt has required as an effect of our faith in him. Rational faith will ſuffice to render men *zealous of good works*; and a zeal, that influences and carries men to others, can be no great recommendation of the faith, that inſpires it. That blind and irrational faith of thoſe, *who never concerned themſelves the leaſt in any argumentative taſks, who never aſked themſelves one ſingle queſtion about it*, has produced a very *lively and active ſpirit of zeal* indeed, ſuch as has waſted mankind with moſt direful perſecutions and bloody maſſacres. Had ſuch kind of believers dealt more in reaſon and argument, as the grounds of their faith, theſe would hardly ever have been the effects of it. For it muſt be owned, that *rational* faith *would prove too cold* upon

the occaſion, that the *calm votary of reaſon's dictates will not ſo readily be brought to expreſs all that* ſanguine *concern for his opinions. He will be apt to be very much wanting in that* warmth. *He will never be ſollicitous enough about the ſucceſs of his inferences, to reſent with ſuch* ardour *the contradiction of his doctrines. The light, that conducts his underſtanding, will never have ſtrength enough to light up ſuch a* potent fire. If by *zeal* ſuch a kind of it is meant, the objection is juſtly laid againſt the zeal, that rational faith produces; but then it lies with the ſame force againſt that, which is required of Chriſtians in the Scriptures; which it could not fail to do, ſeeing they are one and the ſame. It is therein declared to be a good thing to be *zealouſly affected in a good cauſe* [a], but it will never be found to have declared this to be ſuch an one. The zeal there made account of is ſuch, *as is according to knowledge* [b]; but this, ſays this author, [c] *will ſcarce ever deſerve the name.* Let it be ſo, in this notion, and according to this ſtandard, it is owned, it will not; but this is its recommendation, it is enough for us, that in the Scripture ſenſe it does. What is *therein* injoined of zeal, or ought elſe, ſuffices for true Chriſtians; and the zeal, that comes up to that ſacred ſtandard, will hardly be too cold in the eſteem of Chriſt, tho it have never aſſiſted at erecting a ſtake, or concured in puting a heretic to death at it.

But can I from the nature of rational faith be aſſured of my perſiſting in it to my life's end, as it appears from the Scriptures to be the duty of Chriſtians ſo to do in true faith? Tho its being made our duty is no ſecurity of the fact, it is however of the poſſibility of the fact; and rational faith being founded on the internal and external

[a] Gal. iv. 18. [b] Rom. x. 2. [c] p. 25.

evidence of the chriſtian religion is calculated to laſt, till a religion ſurpaſſing it on theſe accounts ſhall appear; which reaſon and Scripture both concur in aſſuring us will not ever be to the end of the world: and I preſume, no faith is to hold out longer. A rational believer has ſome aſſurance of the perpetual power of his principle, from its having already led him into true faith, and from God's having made it his duty to perſevere in it. If God had ſeen, that the means he has choſen to make uſe of for theſe ends of bringing us to faith, and to perſeverance in it, were inſufficient for promoting them; he would never have propoſed the uſe of them to us, nor required ſuch effects in the uſe of them from us. We rationally ſo conclude, becauſe he is *our wiſe and good creator*. Now if in the uſe of theſe means appointed I find the end compleatly accompliſhed in my mind already, in one of the caſes; it may juſtly lead me to infer the like ſufficiency of them for accompliſhing it in the other: and that, if God requires of me not only the exerciſe of faith for the preſent, but perſeverance in it, the means he will afford me, will in the due uſe of them as well inable me to comply with this, as thoſe, which he has afforded me for once believing, have been ſufficient for that; and that nothing will offer in the courſe of my life, that will be in reaſon ſufficient to overturn my faith, any more than there occured any thing able to prevent it. I may juſtly conclude, that my good creator, who has laid the command on me, is fully acquainted with the poſſibility of my compliance, and of my having ſufficient means in my power; and therefore my aſſurance of my ability to do this is equal to the aſſurance, which I have, of God's moral perfections, and of the Goſpel being a revelation of his will: and whether we can

have more aſſurance of theſe truths with or without our reaſon, in the uſe or neglect of it, let every one judge.

It is urged as an argument againſt rational faith, that men have ſtronger attachments to the principles they come by without the uſe of reaſon, than to thoſe they come by in that way. " [a] Reduce " a man once by argument from his original pre- " judices, however groſs and abſurd, and that to " the moſt juſt and well grounded perſuaſion in " nature, and ſee the conſequence; will the at- " tachment of ſuch a proſelyte to his new light " bear any degree of proportion ever after to that " he once expreſſed for thoſe occult and myſte- " rious articles, which he had derived without a " ſyllable of controverſy from the leſſons of his " parents?" The attachments of men to their original prejudices is exceeding ſtrong, it is equally ſo under the various forms of deluſion and impoſture, which prevail in the world; perhaps in ſome inſtances it has more efficacy than that, which is founded on rational conviction. Fanatics, or the pretenders to divine inſpiration, are commonly indued with a more *lively and active ſpirit of zeal*, than the moſt clear ſighted and rational believers. And the cauſe of this I take to be, that in all theſe caſes men act under the influence of their paſſions. Some one or more of them conſtitute their principle; and theſe being of a more warm and combuſtible nature, and commonly more cloſely attended to and followed, are more eaſily kindled into a flame of zeal, and operate in a more vehement and ſurprizing manner, than the calm principle of human reaſon, which beſides is not ſo cloſely and conſtantly obeyed. But if men have much ſtronger attachments to the principles they

[a] p. 27.

they come by without, than to thoſe they come by in the way of reaſon, what will this prove? There could not well be ſtronger attachments, than were thoſe of the Jews to their law, or thoſe of the gentiles to their idols. Suppoſe that, after they were converted to Chriſtianity, *their attachment to their new light ſhould have bore no degree of proportion to* what they once expreſſed to their former principles, which were falſe and abſurd enough; nothing more follows, than that their attachments before exceeded due meaſure, and ſince fell vaſtly ſhort of it. There will be ſomewhat diſadvantageous in this to their characters; but neither Judaiſm nor gentiliſm will hence derive any advantage againſt Chriſtianity, or this lie under any juſt reproach on that account. For the queſtion is not, what difference *there would be in fact* between the attachment to a former falſe, and to a preſent true religion, ſince this could determine nothing about the nature of either, whichſoever of the two the attachment appeared ſtrongeſt to; but the queſtion is, what difference *there might be in reaſon* between the ſeveral attachments, if they bore a due degree of proportion to their reſpective objects. For the attachment of an idolater to the idols, temples, altars, rites, and tenets of his former religion might exceed what he would afterwards diſcover to the true God, to that ſervice of him, which conſiſts in moral virtue, and to the doctrine of eternal life as the reward of it. But would it thence follow, that idolatrous religion really merits the preference to the chriſtian, becauſe it met with a ſtronger attachment? The vulgar and ignorant in all communions, tho ſtrangers to the practice of true religion, diſcover however a very vehement attachment and reverential adherence to that external mode eſtabliſhed among them by a human

human law; perhaps in ſome reſpects greater than many, who are rationally convinced of the truth of the Goſpel, are found to have for it; although they conſider it as the matter of a divine one, and as ſuch pay a laudable regard to it. But will it hence follow, that the attachment of vulgar and weak minds to their favourite *mode* of religion is upon a better foundation, than that which wiſe and pious perſons have to the ſubſtance of it? This would be to ſet up the loweſt of mankind, as a model of perfection for the reſt to imitate; there being often found a force and a fury in their attachments, which is not to be paralleled in thoſe of the calm votaries of reaſon.

True *complacency and ſatisfaction of mind*, I own, ariſes from a *conſciouſneſs of true and genuine faith*, and is a *bleſſed fruit*; but that irrational faith is the true and genuine kind, or that this ſatisfaction and complacency will flow from it, I cannot agree to. It is only the rational belief of Chriſtianity, that I am able to conceive of as equivalent to this effect. When a rational believer reflects on his conduct in attending to the nature and evidence of the Goſpel, on having received thereby conviction of its truth, on having acted conformably to its dictates thro the courſe of his life, and cheriſhes in his heart the faith and hope of the fulfilment of its promiſes; what can be wanting to the true complacency and ſatisfaction of his mind? *The perſon, who never aſked himſelf one ſingle queſtion about his belief*, has properly no belief to injoy ſatisfaction and complacency from. He may have an opinion, which however is as it happens, and which ſome may call faith; and he may perſevere in it with great ſtupidity and obſtinacy, which ſome may call complacency and ſatisfaction of mind; as there have been thoſe, who have called darkneſs light,

and

and evil good: their natures however will be in no wiſe altered by the falſe names, which are affixed to them. But " [a] the philoſophical believer, who " built his faith originally on the force of argu- " ments, may poſſibly find thoſe arguments not " ſo readily occur to his memory in thoſe gloomy " hours, when he has the moſt occaſion for their " ſupport; and conſequently will be liable at eve- " ry turn to his miſgivings and diſtruſts about the " ſufficiency of thoſe reaſonings, he cannot for the " preſent ſo well recollect." If it were to be ſo, he can be in no worſe a caſe even in thoſe *gloomy hours*, than the irrational believer is always in, who never had any arguments to build his faith upon; but it may be expected from the habitual manner of his converſing with them, that the true believer will be in little danger of loſing the remembrance of the arguments of his faith in any circumſtance, wherein he ſhall be maſter of his actions, and juſtly accountable for them.

Rational faith indeed would not be able *to miniſter to our comfort*, if it was not of *force ſufficient* to inable us *to command our paſſions*, and to become *virtuous againſt our inclinations*. All faith is vain, that has not this for its effect; as is all comfort, that has it not for its cauſe. The ſervice of God, as required in the Goſpel, conſiſts in the practice of moral virtue, in oppoſition to whatever powerful inclinations we may have to the contrary. To *fear God, and work righteouſneſs*, is the beſt and moſt acceptable ſervice, we can offer to him. But this was in ſome meaſure the duty of all mankind, before ever the Goſpel came into the world. This was in ſome degree the duty of the heathen world, when reaſon was all that was afforded them for that purpoſe. This muſt therefore be the work of reaſon,

[a] p. 30.

reaſon, or elſe it could never have been incumbent on thoſe, who had nothing but reaſon to do it with. For was not God their *wiſe and good creator* all that while their work lay in this practice, and their power in this principle? Or was he *a hard maſter, reaping where he had not ſown, and gathering where he had not ſtrewed?* St. Paul having repreſented the animal paſſions, and the aſcendency they gain over the mind and conſcience, as the great ſource of ſin in the lives of men, does, in view to the conqueſt of them, exhort the Chriſtians *to preſent their bodies a living ſacrifice unto God*; and calls their doing ſo their *reaſonable ſervice* [a]. And would it not be unaccountable, that ſo much ſhould have been expected from men in the uſe of reaſon alone; and yet, when all the helps of the Goſpel were added to it, it ſhould not be equal to the effect?

This author ſuggeſts a like defect in the principle of rational faith in reſpect to ſuffering, as to active virtue, and with like juſtice; for ſo far is it from being true, that rational faith is not able [b] *to produce a faithful martyr*, that without rational faith their can be no real martyrs at all. How can a man be ſaid to die a real martyr to the truth of Chriſtianity, who has never dealt the leaſt in thoſe arguments, by which it pleaſed God, that the truth of it ſhould be eſtabliſhed? It is the rational conviction ariſing from ſuch arguments, joined with ſuch a laudable bent of the will, which that conviction cheriſhes, that is the ſource and ſupport of the ſuffering ſpirit; as appears in the account, that St. Paul gives of it, as ſubſiſting in himſelf: *For I reaſon,* (λογίζομαι) *that the ſufferings of this preſent time are not worthy to be compared with the glory, which ſhall be revealed in us* [c]. I take

[a] Rom. xii. 1. [b] p. 32. [c] Rom. viii. 18.

a view in the exerciſe of my reaſon of the glory, that is to be injoyed, and the ſufferings which are to be indured; and ſeting them in compariſon, I find the greateſt ſufferings loſt in it, like a moment, when ſet in compariſon with eternity.

There is nothing indeed in the nature of rational faith, that has a tendency to make men over deſirous of becoming martyrs, or to induce them to provoke perſons to the guilt of making them ſuch; nor is there any thing in the example or doctrine of Chriſt to countenance ſuch behaviour. But they, who have attained *the higheſt degree of moral aſſurance* of the perfections of God, and of the truth of the Goſpel, and have lived by the example and doctrine of Chriſt in firm belief of eternal life and happineſs in heaven, when they are put to the dilemma of renouncing their faith, and reverſing their practice, or parting with their life; have ſufficient grounds for a rational determination to imbrace death, as the more eligible of the two, to ſuffer the loſs of life and all things, rather than forego their conſcience, and their character, and their hope of heaven. It may as juſtly be ſaid, that ſuch perſons *live like fools*, as that they *die like them*; and methinks a wiſe man would rather chuſe to be of their number, than of theirs, who call them ſo: for however they may be denominated on either account by men, they will have a better name from him, who is qualified to paſs on them a better judgment.

But if our author will not by any means allow, that rational Chriſtians are able, as ſuch, to incounter the flames, he muſt to do them juſtice allow, that, as ſuch, they will have no inclination to kindle them for others: if he will perſiſt in denying them the ability of ſuffering martyrdom, he muſt own, they will have no inclination to inflict

flict it. This would have been one good conſequence, if the faith called chriſtian, and the perſons ſtiled believers, had been always of the rational kind; that how many martyrs ſoever there might have been, there would have been no makers of them found among Chriſtians. It is the faith, which has diſclaimed all alliance with reaſon, and in higheſt terms claimed its deſcent from divine inſpiration, that has wantonly ſpilt ſo much chriſtian blood, and done ſuch diſhonour to the chriſtian name. It is from this, that ſo many of thoſe called Chriſtians have acted like *madmen*, when rational Chriſtians have ſuffered in our author's opinion like *fools*. For commonly ſpeaking tho thoſe, who have ſuffered martyrdom, have been the real and true Chriſtians; yet they, who have been their cruel perſecutors and murderers, have had the impudence to aſſume that character to themſelves, and the intereſt to be allowed the right to it by others.

F I N I S.

FINIS.